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# THE ROAD TO WISDOM

## SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON *Science and Religion*

**E**XPERIENCE is the only source of knowledge. In the world, religion is the only science where there is no surety, because it is not taught as a science of experience. This should not be. There is always, however, a small group of men who teach religion from experience. They are called mystics, and these mystics in every religion speak the same tongue and teach the same truth. This is the real science of religion. As mathematics in every part of the world does not differ, so the mystics do not differ. They are all similarly constituted and similarly situated. Their experience is the same; and this becomes law.

Religion deals with the truths of the metaphysical world just as chemistry and the other natural sciences deal with the truths of the physical world. The book one must read to learn chemistry is the book of nature. The book from which to learn religion is your own mind and heart.

All science has its particular methods; so has the science of religion. It has more methods also, because it has more material to work upon. The human mind is not homogeneous like the external world. According to the different nature, there must be different methods. As some special sense predominates in a person—one person will see most, another will hear most—so there is a predominant mental sense; and through



this gate must each reach his own mind. Yet through all minds runs a unity, and there is a science which may be applied to all. This science of religion is based on the analysis of the human soul. It has no creed.

No one form of religion will do for all. Each is a pearl on a string. We must be particular above all else to find individuality in each. No man is born to any religion; he has a religion in his own soul. Any system which seeks to destroy individuality is in the long run disastrous. Each life has a current running through it, and this current will eventually take it to God. The end and aim of all religions is to realise God. The greatest of all training is to worship God alone. If each man chose his own ideal and stuck to it, all religious controversy would vanish.

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From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 6.81.



RP - Sanjiv Goenka  
Group



# TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत ।

**Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!**

## Identity of the Universe

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समुद्रादूर्मिर्मधुमागं उदारदुपागंशुना सममृतत्वमानट् ।  
घृतस्य नाम गुह्यं यदस्ति जिह्वा देवानाममृतस्य नाभिः ॥

From the supreme Fount, vast as the ocean, arose the universe in the form of waves yielding enjoyment to created beings. The name designating the self-luminous Reality and consisting of the syllable Om is hidden in the Vedas. By contemplating on the Supreme, along with the slow repetition of that name, one attains immortality. This designation of the Supreme is on the lips of contemplative sages and is the central support of undying Bliss.

*(Mahanarayana Upanishad, 12.8)*

स विश्वकृद् विश्वविदात्मयोनिर्ज्ञः कालकारो गुणी सर्वविद्यः ।  
प्रधानक्षेत्रज्ञपतिर्गुणेशः संसारमोक्षस्थितिबन्धहेतुः ॥

He is the creator of the universe, the knower of the universe, the Atman and the source, the knower, the maker of time, the possessor of attributes, omniscient, the protector of the unmanifested and the jiva, the Lord of the (three) qualities, and the cause of transmigration, liberation, existence, and bondage.

*(Shvetashvatara Upanishad, 6.16)*

मनोमयोऽयं पुरुषो भाःसत्यस्तस्मिन्नन्तर्हृदये यथा व्रीहिर्वा यवो वा स एष  
सर्वस्येशानः सर्वस्याधिपतिः सर्वमिदं प्रशास्ति यदिदं किंच ॥

This Being identified with the mind and resplendent (is realized by yogis) within the heart like a grain of rice or barley. He is the Lord of all, the ruler of all, and governs whatever there is.

*(Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 5.6.1)*

# THIS MONTH

Growth marks life and humankind has been **Passing through Thresholds** in its long history of growth, impelled also by the Divine, in order to reach the final goal.

There is a misconception that philosophy is distinct from sadhana. Dr Ravindra K S Choudhary, Senior Lecturer, Department of Philosophy, Vinoba Bhawe University, Hazaribag, shows that **Philosophy as Sadhana** was integral to India and also to some great Western philosophers.



The influence of Vedanta on J D Salinger is revealed by his association with and letters to Swamis Nikhilananda and Adiswarananda. On 12 April 2013 the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York donated a cache of Salinger's correspondence to the Morgan Library & Museum, and on that occasion Kenneth Slawenski acknowledged the centre with a speech on **J D Salinger and Vedanta**.

The exploitation of women can be neutralized to a great extent if we can understand what women stand for. In the first part of **Women and Rites of Marriage** Rhyddhi Chakraborty, doctoral student at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, writes on womanhood.



Brahmachari Suvimala-chaitanya, of the Ramakrishna Institute of Moral and Spiritual Education, Mysore, shows **India's Contribution to the World** since ancient times and her role in the future.

In the tenth part of **Eternal Words**, Swami Adbhutananda speaks of Swamiji and Keshabchandra Sen. The swami's words are translated from *Sat Katha*, published by Udbodhan Office, Kolkata.

The fourteenth instalment of **Svarajya Siddhibh: Attaining Self-dominion** by the eighteenth century Gangadharendra Saraswati, fifteenth pontiff of Kanchi Kamakoti Pitham, Kanchipuram, dwells on Sankhya philosophy's main aspects.

**The Cultural Heritage of India, Volume 8: The Making of Modern India (1765-1947)**

is brilliantly reviewed by Dr M Sivaramkrishna, who considers the volume a mine of scholarly exploration indispensable for India's cultural history. The reviewer is a former head of the Department of English, Osmania University, Hyderabad.



# Passing Through Thresholds

THERE ARE TIMES WHEN we come to a new stage of life. Some unknown force pushes us forwards, while a gut feeling signals major or minor changes in the offing. A part of this force is but the result of what we have worked for, consciously and sub-consciously. Another part comprises of social forces, or other minds that have similarly worked like ours. Threshold means ‘opening’, ‘edge’, ‘entrance’, ‘gate’, ‘inception’, ‘starting point’, and so on. Just as we pass through thresholds in individual life, the same is true of collective life when society progresses forwards. Things come to a point and break into or shift to a new paradigm, a new avenue.

Passing through thresholds is the history not only of the human race but also of the mighty processes of evolution going on for billions of years. A species reaches a critical point and then transforms into something different. Thresholds are also passed through in the evolution of the universe. The inflation, clumping, and formation of the universe has gone through many stages in its 13.7 billion years, as visible matter undergo changes on mind-boggling scales. The concept of threshold is now used in every possible field of human endeavour and understanding because this concept is a law embedded in nature.

Threshold ordinarily means ‘a strip of wood or stone forming the bottom of a doorway and crossed in entering a house or room’, or ‘the start of a new state or experience’. It is also a metaphor to explain internal travel from one level of life to

another, or from one point of time and space to another. Everything and everyone has a different level of threshold, say of pain or of perceiving sensations. Till the threshold is reached there is no reaction, but once the threshold is passed through, then comes the reaction.

The travel from one threshold to another depends on the effort one puts into particular areas one is in. It may be studies, research, material progress, and even spirituality. Every small effort contributes to the sum total of progress and growth. Often, and in many fields, the process is a long-drawn one, but as the *Yoga Sutra* says: ‘*Mridu-madhyadi matra-tvat-tato’pi visheshah*; success of yogis differs according to the means they adopt—mild, medium, or intense.’ It also teaches: ‘*Tivra-samveganam-asanah*; success is quick for the extremely energetic.’ Thus the more dynamic one is, the more one keeps moving forwards and onwards.

Everything is impelled by nature and hence nothing is static in life. Moreover, we are born with strong desires, which are translated into achieving, accomplishing, and being something. It does not only mean that we pass through thresholds that are good; there are many who pass through thresholds that are bad, and once the engine starts, it is difficult to stop, as one keeps becoming more and more evil. At this point we can be helped, provided we keep in mind Swami Vivekananda’s words: ‘The goal of mankind is knowledge. Pleasure is not the goal of man, but knowledge. Pleasure and happiness come to an end. The cause



of all the miseries we have in the world is that men foolishly think pleasure to be the ideal to strive for. After a time man finds that it is not happiness, but knowledge, towards which he is going, and that pleasure and pain are great teachers, and that he learns as much from evil as from good.'

The real reason we are interested in thresholds is because as we keep passing through one after another, we also pass through various thresholds of consciousness. We get a wrong picture, even from many modern studies, that consciousness has only one level. Consequently, we unnecessarily labour under this illusion. Vedanta and Yoga philosophies say there are various levels of consciousness. Every generation builds on the work of the previous one, and thus humankind moves forwards. Nobody can deny that we are not moving to higher cognitive levels. This is the sign of real human progress. In this we are impelled also by the collective consciousness.

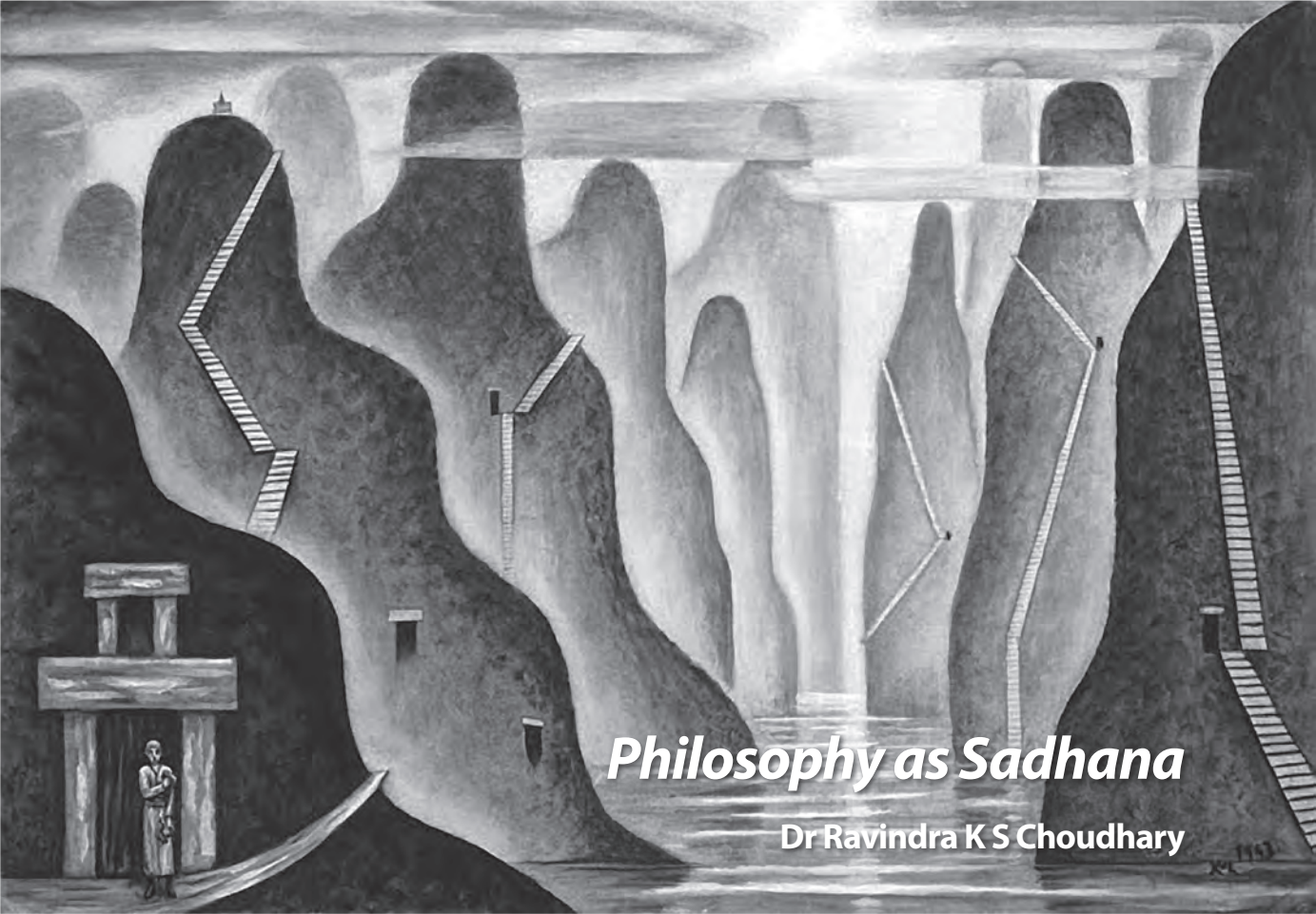
No one can, however, move forwards unless one has finished one's karma at a particular level. Swamiji says: 'Our Karma determines what we deserve and what we can assimilate. We are responsible for what we are; and whatever we wish ourselves to be, we have the power to make ourselves. If what we are now has been the result of our own past actions, it certainly follows that whatever we wish to be in future can be produced by our present actions.' This is true in every aspect of social life too. In the spiritual endeavour, which is the struggle for moksha, liberation, we travel from lower levels of consciousness to higher ones. Some of these states of consciousness are technically called in the *Yoga Sutra* as *savitarka*, *nirvitarka*, *savichara*, *nirvichara*, *sananda*, and *sasmita*. These *savikalpa* samadhis rise progressively from the subtle, beyond time and space, and right into the heart of existence. One then passes through

the last threshold to plunge into *nirvikalpa* samadhi, the highest possible absolute experience that a human being is capable of.

At times the world experiences a great wave of spiritual power that carries us forwards with little effort. At the head of this wave comes the avatara, who embodies this power. The present age is experiencing such a power, pushing humankind to higher levels of cognition, human concepts, and spirituality, which is cutting across all castes, creeds, races, and nations. The power had to be great because humankind was unable to pass through an important threshold in order to undertake a new task of rebuilding itself. That is the reason why Sri Ramakrishna, the avatara of this age, brought his Shakti, the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, along with Swami Vivekananda and other mighty direct disciples.

Just as humans journey to pass through higher thresholds of consciousness, Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother do the opposite and descend to the lowest levels of manifest consciousness in order to lift and push everyone up! Not just humankind but also animals, birds, plants—everything. We find the Holy Mother saying: 'I am the mother of the wicked, as I am the mother of the virtuous. Whenever you are in distress, just say to yourself "I have a mother."' Once a disciple asked: "Are you the Mother of all?" "Yes," replied the Mother. "Even of these lowest creatures?" pressed the enquirer. "Yes," answered the Mother.' This great power that has descended to this world has the form of an infinite loving mother who denies no one and who is lifting each soul to the highest level of spiritual and material evolution. This power of the avatara, which literally means 'to descend', is lifting and carrying humanity to the threshold of rightly understanding God, ourselves, and the world.





## Philosophy as Sadhana

Dr Ravindra K S Choudhary

PAINTING: 'FIORDO', BY XUL SOLAR, 1943 / MUSEUM XUL SOLAR, BUENOS AIRES

SADHANA LIES AT THE HEART of every way of life and is truer in the field of religion. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* teaches that the Atman 'should be realized—should be heard of, reflected on, and meditated upon.'<sup>1</sup> The aim of Advaitic sadhana is the realization of the Atman as one with Brahman. Sadhana is essential in Advaita Vedanta. Brahman is absolute, indeterminate, and beyond all modes of conceptualization. Accordingly, Brahman cannot be realized unless the spiritual aspirant transcends all categorical frameworks by attuning one's mind to the Reality behind the facade of variety.

Such a spiritual discipline seems at first glance to be antithetical to a logical or rational scheme of thought, which has predominantly characterized traditional philosophical enterprise. It has rightly been observed that 'the culture which

most of us have inherited is too extroverted and too aggressively intellectual to permit us to understand within a short time what it all means to be a sādḥaka, a practical aspirant for a truth of which in our homes and colleges we were given an inkling.'<sup>2</sup> Consequently, critics and sceptics are inclined to consider spiritual discipline as illogical. Some even declare that the course of sadhana eventually turns out to be the destroyer of philosophy due to its non-rational character.

In response to my work on a survey of the parallels between Wittgensteinian philosophy and Advaita Vedanta,<sup>3</sup> Daya Krishna, an eminent contemporary Indian philosopher, in a letter dated 21 August 2007 wrote to me: 'Advaitic Philosophy is essentially related to Advaitic sadhana or the realization of Brahman, which, as far as I am aware, neither Wittgenstein nor any

other school of Western philosophy demands, as such a demand will destroy the philosophical enterprise fundamentally and foundationally.’

It is against this background that I will discuss Advaitic sadhana vis-à-vis philosophical enterprise. In view of the critical point raised by Daya Krishna, I will adopt an affirmative approach towards sadhana, upholding it as a virtue rather than as a destroyer of philosophical enterprise. For, in reality, it is the harmony of the intellectual and the spiritual that leads one towards Self-realization.

### **Going Beyond Epistemology**

Why does it appear that Advaita or any sadhana destroys philosophical enterprise? This problem generally arises due to the conception of philosophy taken by many Western traditions. Philosophy in the West has been predominantly intellectual. It is therefore argued that philosophy, being a logical and critical enterprise, must remain confined to the rational explanation of things. Since sadhana is regarded as belonging to the religio-spiritual sphere, mainstream Western philosophical traditions find it uncomfortable. W T Stace says: ‘Philosophy is founded upon reason. It is the effort to comprehend, to understand, to grasp the reality of things intellectually. Therefore it cannot admit anything higher than reason. To exalt intuition, ecstasy, or rapture, above thought—this is death to philosophy.’<sup>4</sup>

Such an idea of philosophy, confined only to reason, is psychologically one-sided and can yield only a partial view of Reality. As William James declares: ‘Our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different.’<sup>5</sup>

Some of our profound experiences remain beyond normal comprehension just because our

reason is habitually restricted to logical thinking; it cannot penetrate into the realm of spirituality, where Self-realization actually occurs. Thus the philosophical creed that relies exclusively on reason misses some vital aspects of being and also of knowing. To quote Sri Aurobindo: ‘Spiritual intuition is always a more luminous guide than the discriminating reason, and spiritual intuition addresses itself to us not only through reason, but through the rest of our being as well, through the heart and life also.’<sup>6</sup>

Sadhana is very likely to be mistakenly viewed as the destroyer of philosophical enterprise, particularly ‘if we believe in a thoroughgoing a-posteriorism’.<sup>7</sup> The Truth or Reality is supposed here as something lying entirely outside us, and we are set to acquire it through the processes of thinking. The final outcome is a world view so fragmented in itself that it sooner or later fails even to satisfy human reason. The ‘world outside’ view may serve our practical purposes at the level of *vyavahara*, daily dealings, but our reason itself, by way of inherent contradictions, suggests a higher level of intuitive experience. Thus ‘Advaita aims at directing one’s thought beyond thought to an intuitive realisation wherein knowing and being cease to have any difference.’<sup>8</sup> As the emphasis here is *not on what I know but on what I become*, the Advaitin goes beyond the usual limits of epistemology; he wants the whole approach changed.

Our inbuilt spiritual aspiration involves an intuitively felt unity of the Real, which transcends any reduction to rational categories of thought. The intellectual construction in this connection need not necessarily be regarded as fake but as something significant leading towards transcendence. Reason operates in distinctions and dichotomies, showing every now and then its own limitations. There is thus a limit beyond which rational thought must undergo a profound transformation; otherwise it tends



to turn into self-refutation. When thought goes deeper and deeper, without any discipline of a higher order, it is in fact aiming at suicide, for 'thought is relational and discursive and if it ceases to be this, it commits suicide.'<sup>9</sup> Thought need not commit suicide, if it gets integrated into 'a higher intuition' (ibid.). And this is what actually happens to philosophical enterprise when it is integrated with spiritual discipline. Reason assimilated with higher intuition becomes a razor-sharp instrument.

This is the reason why Indian wisdom leans more towards realization than reasoning, not by abnegating the role of the intellectual understanding of things but by making it subservient to direct intuition. In the *Chhandogya Upanishad* we witness the whole gamut of sacrifices gradually transformed into subtler concepts. We also find many meditations designed to lead the spiritual aspirant from the gross to the subtle and to ever subtler realms. This principle is the distinctive characteristic of Eastern wisdom. Thought and things, form and matter, are inter-related, and it is believed that 'as is a person's faith so does he become'.<sup>10</sup> Swami Vivekananda also concluded that in 'the Upanishads meditation on Brahman was thus harmonized and identified with life and as a result the whole of life became transformed into one single meditation.'<sup>11</sup>

If the matter is understood thus, the bearings of sadhana on philosophical thinking are just the opposite of destruction. Sadhana does not really destroy philosophical enterprise but transforms the latter into a higher intuitive experience, thereby saving it from committing suicide. 'This intuitive experience', from the Advaitic standpoint, 'is the real test or criterion that *tattva-jñāna* or real philosophical knowledge has been attained.'<sup>12</sup> In this way, the Advaitic sadhana can be regarded as the culmination of all philosophizing.

### **Philosophy and Spirituality Harmonized**

There is no point in thinking things just for the sake of an intellectual adventure. Neither in the East nor in the West has philosophical thinking been a thoroughly rational venture. Great philosophies have not originated and developed simply as a rational response to Reality. A philosopher penetratingly perceives a fault line in the factuality, which gives rise to an intellectual upheaval within him. A philosopher's dissatisfaction with actualities prompts him or her to think upon things deeply. That is why Swamiji not only admired the wisdom and compassion of Buddha, but also regarded him as the sanest philosopher the world has ever witnessed. It is no accident that Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path begins with the 'right outlook' and culminates in the 'right concentration'.

Although Advaita philosophy is basically rooted in our spiritual urge, one should not regard the philosophical thinking ingrained in it as trivial. Different schools of Indian philosophy accord importance to reason and spirituality in varying degrees. For instance, compared to the Nyaya school, the Yoga school has much to say on meditation and sadhana. Does this mean that the Yoga school has no philosophical position at all? It is, in fact, quite natural that these elements vary considerably from one philosophy to another.

Regarding the contention that the Advaitin does not follow the proper way of presenting philosophy due to his or her preoccupation with sadhana, it can be argued that many of the great philosophers of the West—like Socrates, Plato, Plotinus, St Augustine, St Aquinas, Spinoza, and Kant, to mention a few—did also present in their systems forms of spiritual disciplines much akin to sadhana. The translation of the word 'sadhana' in the Western tradition is 'contemplation', which has an obvious religio-spiritual connotation. Contemplation has also been viewed there in the Advaitic spirit: 'Knowledge consisting

in the partial or complete identification of the knower with the object of knowledge with the consequent loss of his own individuality.<sup>13</sup> Contemplation is thus considered in the Western tradition as 'the highest stage of knowledge' (ibid.), well above cognition and meditation.

We can now understand why Bertrand Russell, in spite of all his advocacy of a logical and scientific line of thought, begins his *History of Western Philosophy* by saying:

The conceptions of life and the world which we call 'philosophical' are a product of two factors: one, inherited religious and ethical conceptions; the other, the sort of investigation which may be called 'scientific', using this word in its broadest sense. Individual philosophers have differed widely in regard to the proportions in which these two factors entered into their systems, but it is the presence of both, in some degree, that characterizes philosophy.<sup>14</sup>

Russell points out further that 'in Plato, St Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, Spinoza and Leibnitz there is an intimate blending of religion and reasoning' (45).

Also noteworthy is the fact that Russell qualified his 'history of philosophy' with the adjective 'Western', suggesting that there are philosophies other than Western. But other historians have mostly omitted non-Western philosophies. Will Durant rightly says: 'The worst sin of all—though the critics do not seem to have noticed it—was the omission of Chinese and Hindu philosophy.'<sup>15</sup>

Every philosophical position has a certain intellectual content as well as some practical functions. The former makes it more or less academic, whereas the latter concerns life's urges and ideals. These two factors may be found in varying degrees in particular philosophies, but neither of them can be totally absent. Accordingly, Advaita Vedanta too has an intellectual content that adds an academic or pedagogical side to it, commonly

known as 'Advaita *siddhanta*'.<sup>16</sup> That is why India has a rich and hoary tradition of Advaita teachings. What an Advaitin transmits is not one's intuitive experience in the original, for this *sui generis* experience cannot be transmitted as such. However, Advaitins do have a philosophical position, *siddhanta*, with regard to ordinary and spiritual experiences. They defend and transmit it by making significant use of logic and language.<sup>17</sup> Their insights into Reality are, in a sense, sustainable by reason. William James says: 'In spite of all their repudiation of articulate self-description, mystical states in general assert a pretty distinct theoretic drift. It is possible to give the outcome of the majority of them in terms that point in definite philosophical directions. One of these directions is optimism, and the other is monism.'<sup>18</sup>

Thus mystical experience can be subject to human understanding in a telling manner. When an Advaitin says that mystical experiences cannot be explained through language, one does not simply take leave of reason. One is not afraid to go beyond logic and reason because one knows intuitively that the Reality transcends rational thinking. The approach one adopts in realizing the ultimate Reality is not non-rational but trans-rational. An Advaitin's way of life and thought show that all reasoned positions are meant for people still engrossed in the workaday world. Life's ideal is the realization of one's Self, which is identical with the ultimate Reality. This Advaitic realization is achievable only after all circumscribed views are transcended. Advaita as a philosophical position satisfies both the rational and religious striving of humankind. In the Advaitic way of life and thought theory and sadhana are not antithetical but complementary.

Sadhana devoid of rational thinking amounts to what Wittgenstein calls 'private language'. It does not seem to serve our philosophical purpose at all, however useful it might be in

Self-realization. The higher intuitive experience occurring in sadhana is, as was stated above, of a *sui generis* character, cannot be expressed through language; it is ineffable and cannot be captured in any conceptual framework. Yet in the philosophical position adopted by Advaitins we have, somehow, an inkling of the Truth thus realized. The Advaitins have not actually transmitted their intuitive experience of the ultimate Truth for the simple reason that such an experience, by its very nature, cannot be transmitted—‘what they transmitted were their views, their systems of thought.’<sup>19</sup>

*Siddhanta* too, in its turn, calls for a tinge of sadhana in order to be authentic. Philosophy without actualization results in nothing but sham and hypocrisy. Mere rational knowledge is of little value if it does not lead one to the realization of Reality. The process of thinking can never be free from contemplation. Whenever we are set to think something deep and thorough, we need first of all to be steadfastly concentrated. Thus a philosopher can very well be a contemplative. Besides, ethical preparation is equally important for Self-realization. Our thoughts are often motivated by egoistic desires. The *Katha Upanishad* teaches: ‘One who has not desisted from bad conduct, whose senses are not under control, whose mind is not concentrated, whose mind is not free from anxiety, cannot attain this Atman through knowledge.’<sup>20</sup> Sadhana is an advanced course in pursuit of spiritual wisdom marked by discipline and austerity.

Philosophy makes similar demands on us as its true practitioners. In the West there have also appeared certain profound thinkers who can justly be called ‘philosopher-sadhakas.’<sup>21</sup> Socrates was clearly one of them, and so were Plato, St Augustine, Spinoza, Kant, and others. In his *Republic*, Plato has summed up certain marks of the philosophic disposition: An earnest desire

to know the real, a strong dislike for falsehood, contempt for bodily pleasures, indifference to money, high-mindedness, an immediate apprehension and a harmonious disposition.<sup>22</sup> If the true philosophic disposition is marked by such features, then it is obviously very close and conducive to Advaita sadhana.

(To be concluded)

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18. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 319.
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20. *Katha Upanishad*, 1.2.24.
21. See *Philosophy of Hindu Sadhana*, 146.
22. See Plato, *Republic*, Book 4.





## ***J D Salinger and Vedanta***

**Kenneth Slawenski**

I would like to speak as an average reader, a reader who has asked this very question many times in my life. But I have never asked the question more often or with more urgency than when it came to the writings of J D Salinger (1919–2010).

### ***The Source of Inspiration***

Salinger's stories spoke to me on a personal level and seemed to resonate with spiritual messages that inspired and gave me comfort. He had not produced a deep resource of literature: just four thin books, a single novella, and twenty-one very slim short stories. Yet, within the accessible and often humorous prose of this brief output, I sensed something large brimming just beneath the surface: gentle messages exposing fundamental issues about the meaning of life, exploring the nature of humanity and the existence of God. So I came to understand Salinger's stories as steps along the path of a spiritual journey, but I wondered about the source of that inspiration.

**H**OW MANY TIMES have you read a book, a poem, or a story that seemed to speak directly to you, that uplifted you or inspired you to grow? And how many times did you wonder, after reading that book or story, whether the author had actually intended to say what you had perceived, or whether you were simply misinterpreting the text in order to match your own personal needs? Author intent matters. It matters to readers. It matters to those of us who love literature. The messages a writer seeks to present through his work are important to those who find strength in the words. A writer can deliver information, humour, and wit. But the greatest gift an author can give is to comfort us with the assurance that we are not alone.

I am far from alone with that perception. Over the years millions of average readers have sensed a spiritual underpinning to Salinger's works that has inspired and even enlightened them. And like me, many wondered whether the author was trying to convey a deliberate spiritual message, and if so, what that message might be. It was a question with no obvious answer. Rumours of Salinger's personal life suggested a revolving door of religious positions, and his stories seemed to present any number of beliefs. He prefaced his *Nine Stories* collection with a Zen *koan*<sup>1</sup>, so many figured him to be Buddhist. His story 'De Daumier-Smith's Blue Period' centred on a nun, so perhaps he was Roman Catholic. But his book *Franny and Zooey* explored the Russian Orthodox Jesus prayer, so maybe he was an Orthodox Christian. And what about his later works? His final book offered a Taoist tale, but quoted liberally from the Indian holy man Sri Ramakrishna; and his last publication contained a long homage to Swami Vivekananda, who had brought Vedanta to the West. It all seemed like a confusing smorgasbord of doctrines, especially coming from the grandson of a rabbi.

Tonight we celebrate the donation of an important cache of Salinger's correspondence by the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York to the Morgan Library & Museum. The centrepiece of the collection are letters written by Salinger between 1967 and 1975 to Swami Nikhilananda and Swami Adiswarananda, spiritual leaders of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, but it is important to note that Salinger continued to correspond with the centre through 1996—representing an unbroken relationship that spanned forty-five years—and that, according to his widow, Colleen, Salinger drew great strength from the centre's continuous mailings and monthly devotional bulletin until his death in 2010. So, making these documents public will

go far in adding balance to the popular perception of Salinger's life by spotlighting the intensely spiritual side of his complex character and, perhaps even more importantly, encourage readers to re-examine the author's writings with fresh eyes.

In light of the commonly held belief that Salinger flew from one religious conviction to another, this material evidence of his consistent respect for Vedanta is like lowering a drawbridge that connects us, as readers, to the spiritual foundation Salinger deliberately imbedded into so much of his work. They help us to slice past many interpretations of Salinger's writings that ignore or otherwise sideline the influence of Vedanta and help to reveal the spiritual messages so often avoided by critics and academics, but instinctively perceived by readers.

### ***Introduced to Vedanta***

For those unfamiliar with Vedanta, it is an ancient belief system that first originated in India and was reinvigorated in modern times by the Bengali holy man Sri Ramakrishna. Vedanta was introduced to the West in 1893 by Sri Ramakrishna's principal disciple, Swami Vivekananda. Vivekananda spent three years travelling throughout the United States spreading the idea of the harmony of religions—the conviction that all faiths that lead to a realization of God are equally valid—and teaching the concept of the four yogas, paths by which individuals can obtain a closer union with God. Both of these teachings had a profound effect upon Salinger and made deep inroads into his work.

Salinger was introduced to Vedanta just as he was putting the finishing touches on *The Catcher in the Rye*. By 1951 he was regularly attending services and lectures at the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center—a mere two blocks from the Park Avenue apartment in which he had been raised and studying under Nikhilananda, whom

he embraced as his spiritual teacher. Nikhilananda was himself an accomplished author, and Salinger eagerly studied his writings. Several of the letters being donated tonight acknowledge Salinger's esteem for Nikhilananda's works. But none of the swami's publications seems to have resonated with Salinger more than Nikhilananda's translation of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, the literary paragon of Vedantic faith. Salinger was electrified by the book's contents, a collection of the sage's teachings and conversations. That December he wrote with a convert's zeal to his British publisher about the text, extolling it as 'the greatest religious book of the century'. It was an enthusiasm that would stay with Salinger, and one that he would pass on to his fictional characters.

When Salinger adopted Nikhilananda as his personal teacher, he knew he was taking a major lifetime step. Nikhilananda was no ecclesiastical Santa Claus. He was a formidable presence, tall and robust, and exuded a determined energy. And he drove the message home without compromise. Born in 1895 to a middle-class family in present-day Bangladesh, after studying journalism at the University of Calcutta, Nikhilananda fought against colonial rule in India and was imprisoned by the British for insurrection. But after absorbing the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, he joined the Ramakrishna Order and received spiritual instruction [initiation] from Sri Sarada Devi, the wife and spiritual companion of Sri Ramakrishna himself. In 1931 the Order sent Nikhilananda to the United States, where in 1933 he founded the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center on Manhattan's upper east side.

But it was another location sacred to Vedanta that had a major effect upon Salinger and solidified his relationship with Nikhilananda. On Wellesley Island in the Saint Lawrence River is the small, idyllic community of Thousand Island Park. It was there that Vivekananda stayed for

seven weeks in 1895 in an ornate Victorian cottage nestled in the woods. Within his upstairs room, Vivekananda wrote and meditated and enjoyed what he considered to be his most productive time outside of India.

In 1947 Nikhilananda determined to purchase the cottage, which had suffered from decades of neglect, and after an arduous renovation to its former glory, christened it as Vivekananda Cottage, the spiritual retreat of New York's Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center. In a short time members of the centre could be seen occupying the cottage during the summer months, and daily vespers could be heard wafting from Vivekananda's upstairs room. Seminars were held within the cottage and Nikhilananda could be overheard reading to groups of followers from the Upanishads and *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Salinger is on record for having attended Nikhilananda's summer seminars at Thousand Island Park in July 1952, and again the following year. There he attended lectures and meditated in the sanctuary of the upstairs room.

By Salinger's own assessment, his experience in the Vivekananda Cottage was transcendent. He recalled it with reverence, and the effect seems to have been one of creative as well as spiritual inspiration. It is no coincidence that almost immediately upon leaving Thousand Island Park, Salinger left New York in search of his own home and purchased a tract of hillside property in rural New Hampshire—complete with a dishevelled cottage set in the woods, a near-perfect New Hampshire version of the Vivekananda Cottage and grounds.

The same year that Salinger moved to New Hampshire, he began to present the teachings of Vedanta through his fiction. In order to convey his message, he created the fictional Glass characters, a family of spiritual seekers who populated every book and story he wrote after 1953. That

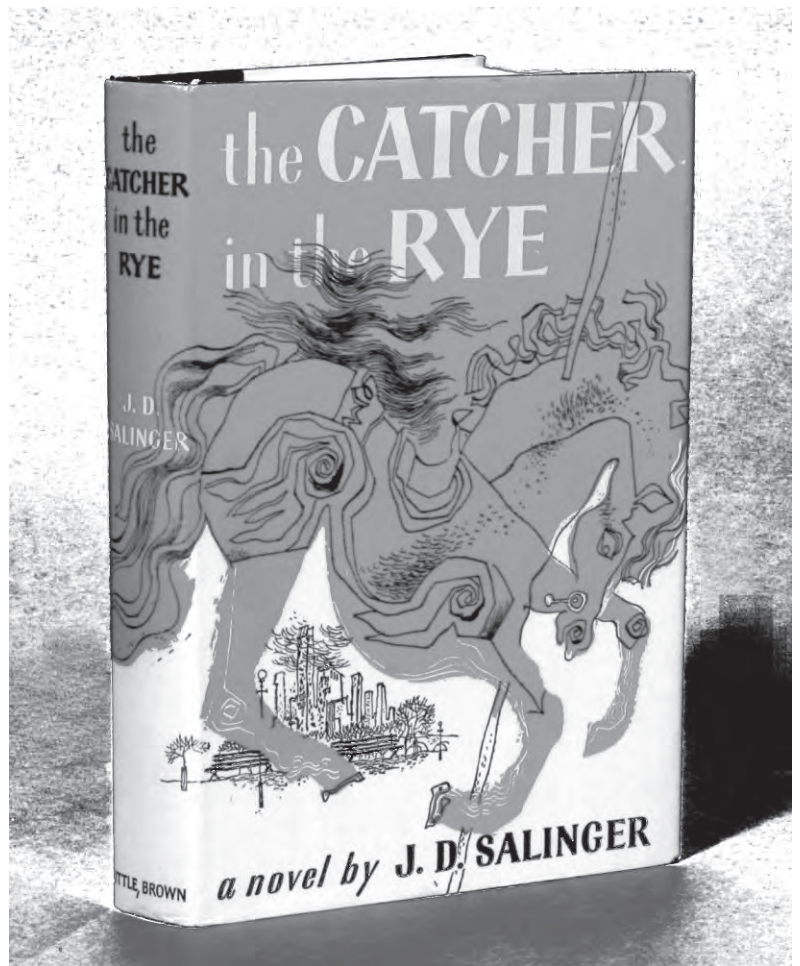


message intensified with each succeeding work, consuming the 1961 blockbuster *Franny and Zooey* and continuing in Salinger's fourth book, *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour—An Introduction*. In 1965 Salinger produced his final publication, a story printed in *The New Yorker* titled 'Hapworth 16, 1924'. It was in 'Hapworth' that Salinger delivered a direct tribute to Vivekananda and perhaps his clearest declaration of Vedanta.

### **The Ideas of Vedanta**

Salinger's Glass family characters were deliberately crafted to resemble his readership—who were modern, American, and largely urban—in order to reach them with Eastern philosophies they might distrust coming from characters less familiar. Salinger explained as much to Nikhilananda in 1961, when he presented the swami with an inscribed copy of *Franny and Zooey*, the most successful book Salinger ever published apart from *The Catcher in the Rye*. Now Sri Ramakrishna had stressed the importance of humility and warned his followers against embracing the fruits of their labour, instructing them to return those benefits back to God. But Salinger assured Nikhilananda that he had written the book not to amass fame or fortune but 'to circulate the ideas of Vedanta'.

That was a slippery tightrope to navigate. In order to 'circulate the ideas of Vedanta' to as wide an audience as possible, it was vital that Salinger's books become as successful as possible. But such success inevitably brought with it an assortment



of spiritual poisons: material wealth, celebrity, and the temptation of the ego. Even at Thousand Island Park the fruits of Salinger's successes were inescapable. Small groups of young girls would follow the author as he climbed the hill from his bungalow in town up to Vivekananda Cottage, each clutching a copy of *The Catcher in the Rye* and trying to muster the courage to approach Salinger for an autograph.

To some, Salinger's claim might seem odd on another level. More than any book, he wrote, *Franny and Zooey* relies upon a steady stream of Christian references. But once we recognize that the harmony of religions is a cornerstone of Vedanta, the variety of different religious references in Salinger's stories begins to make sense.

Of course, not all religious doctrines are in agreement with Vedanta, but those that are not are conspicuously absent from his works. Every religious allusion Salinger used, from the Taoist tale in *Carpenters*, to the Zen *koans* in *Seymour—An Introduction*, or even the nuns in *The Catcher in the Rye*, are presented in careful concert with the teachings of Vedanta.

But perhaps the single teaching of Vedanta that most informed Salinger's work, and possibly most affected his life, is the Vedantic concept of karma yoga. Karma yoga teaches that everything in life, from one's vocation to the smallest daily duty, can be approached as an act of service, accomplished as a prayer, as a meditation, and can lead to a clearer realization of God. Salinger readily embraced the concept of karma yoga as an interpretation of his own craft. In short, he came to believe that his own work, his

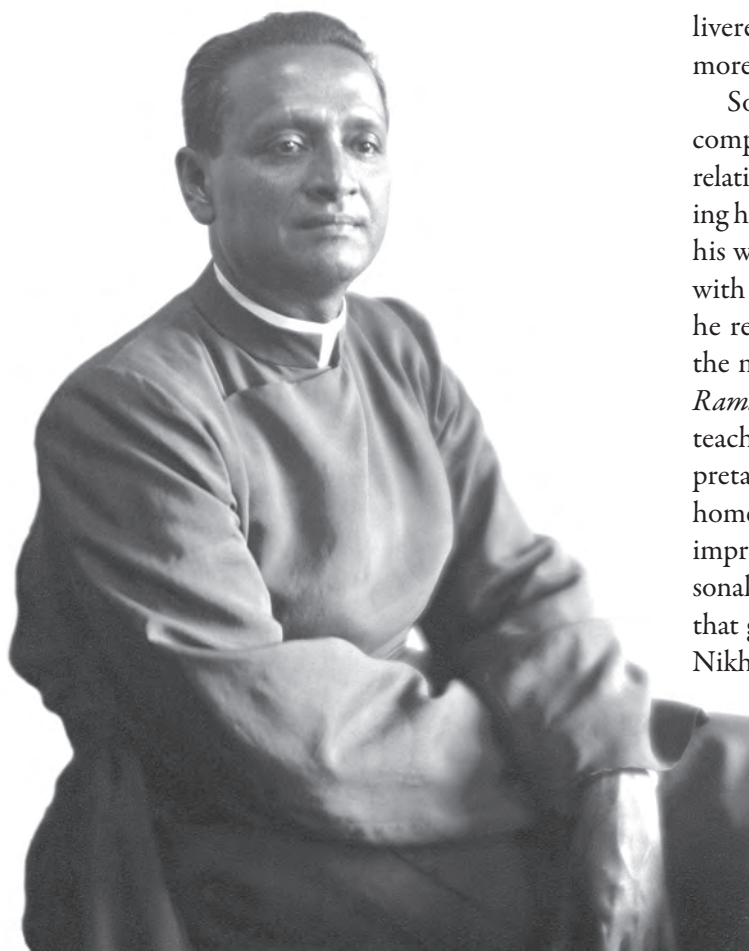
writings, were potentially holy, and he learned to regard his work as a path to unity with God if approached and executed with humility.

And much of his work conveys the message of karma yoga. His characters struggle to encounter it, to perform it and perfect it. When Franny seeks to fulfil the biblical exhortation to 'pray without ceasing' in *Franny and Zooey*, she is seeking out karma yoga. When Zooey encourages her to be God's actress, he is urging karma yoga. When he repeats his brother's parable of 'The Fat Lady' and shines his shoes for Christ himself, he is recognizing karma yoga. When Seymour Glass, in Salinger's final publication, gives his life over to the service of God, he is practising karma yoga.

But Salinger's embrace of karma yoga inevitably clashed with the materialism and egotism necessary for publishing and promoting his books in modern America, and he eventually resolved that the fame his literary successes delivered—the vulgar fruits of his labour—were more spiritual quicksand than service.

So Salinger abandoned publishing after 1965, completing a gradual retreat into a private life of relative simplicity. Still, he never ceased considering himself a working writer. Likewise, long after his withdrawal from the public arena, his bond with Nikhilananda remained strong. Foremost, he respected the swami as a spiritual teacher, the man whose translation of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* had allowed him to experience the teachings of Vedanta and whose personal interpretation of those teachings had brought them home. Secondly, Salinger could not help but be impressed by the swami's countenance and personal history, which gifted him with an authority that gave his opinions an extraordinary weight. Nikhilananda, in short, had dived headlong into

his work, and Salinger, who had done his own share of heavy lifting, certainly respected that. But perhaps equally vital to



Swami Nikhilananda (1945)

Box 32  
Windsor, Vt. 05089  
Jan. 19, 1972

Dear Swami Nikhilananda,

Thank you for your very kind and warm letter.

Any letter from you, message or comment, has always had a wonderfully restorative effect on me.

.....  
.....  
.....  
matter rather differently. Meaning that I've forgotten many worthy and important things in my life, but I have never forgotten the way you used to read from, and interpret, the Upanishads, up at Thousand Island Park.

With great affection and respect, always,

Sincerely,

*J.D. Salinger*

the bond between them was the swami's earned status as an author, as a man of scholarship and letters, a position that doubtless accorded Salinger's impression that the swami was something of a kindred spirit who shared and therefore understood his own calling. It allowed for a closeness and ease between the two men that transcended an ordinary relationship between a spiritual teacher and his pupil.

### **The Letters**

Letters sent by Salinger to the swami reveal an ongoing relationship of mutual admiration and trust. Their correspondence covered not only spiritual topics but also personal subjects including information on well-being of Salinger's family, discussions on health, current events, and the status of each other's work.

Salinger queried the swami's stance on the benefits of holistic medicine, and Nikhilananda turned to Salinger for thoughts regarding his own writings, which Salinger enthusiastically endorsed. Moreover, author and teacher provided each other comfort in times of need. In

the opening years of the 1970s Nikhilananda's health began to fail and he found himself dependent upon a wheelchair. Feeling discouraged that he could no longer perform his duties as robustly as he had in past years, Nikhilananda confided his concerns to Salinger, lamenting that he could do little more in his present condition than read from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* to small groups of devotees. 'I imagine the students who are lucky enough to hear you read from the *Gospel* would put the matter rather differently,' Salinger pointed out. He then reminded the swami of their time together at the Vivekananda Cottage. 'I've forgotten many worthy and important things in my life,' Salinger confessed, 'but I have never forgotten the way you used to read from, and interpret, the Upanishads, up at Thousand Island Park.'

Nikhilananda passed away in 1973, less than two years after Salinger delivered his words of comfort. He had been leader of the New York centre since its inception forty years before and Salinger's friend and mentor for more than twenty. Salinger travelled to New York to visit



the centre and after being recognized by a young attendant while obtaining incense, was introduced to Adiswarananda, who had succeeded Nikhilananda as the centre's spiritual leader. To a large extent Salinger established a rapport with Adiswarananda similar to what he had enjoyed with Nikhilananda. But Salinger's correspondence makes it clear that the author sorely missed his long-time friend and that his reverence for Nikhilananda remained strong and at the forefront of his mind. He remembered the swami to Adiswarananda as someone who possessed 'inspired intelligence, devotion, and authority' and spoke of him longingly.

For his part Adiswarananda counselled Salinger at pivotal times in his life: after the death of Salinger's parents, and not long after the author's break-up with Joyce Maynard, an aspiring young writer thirty-four years Salinger's junior. One suspects that Salinger may have blamed his own spiritual weakness for allowing the relationship with Maynard. In frustration, he confided to the swami that he was dissatisfied with his spiritual progress. In analogy, he quoted lines from an ancient Sanskrit poem that had been recommended to him by Nikhilananda years before: "In the forest-tract of sense pleasures there prowls a huge tiger called the mind. Let good people who have a longing for liberation never go there." I suspect that nothing is truer than that,' Salinger added, 'and yet I allow myself to be mauled by that old tiger almost every wakeful minute of my life.'

These are just a few background references that help make the letters we recognize tonight so fascinating. But they are more than mere correspondence between an author and his spiritual teachers. They are an affirmation, a reassurance to readers worldwide who have intuitively sensed the spiritual essence contained within Salinger's works and who have wondered, just as I had

wondered, whether that spirituality was a deliberate contribution imbedded by the author or something imagined by the reader. Salinger's letters to the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center help to solve that mystery in a material way. Everything Salinger wrote after, and perhaps including, *The Catcher in the Rye* was clearly influenced by Vedanta and offered to the public as solace to what Salinger recognized to be a spiritually aching world.

But I cannot properly dissect Salinger's writings to expose every instance of Vedanta within them—the Vedanta that holds them together and that speaks to our hearts as readers. Only you can do that. Vedanta is a faith that embraces every path to oneness with God regardless of the label: Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, or Christian. It is a doctrine of inclusion that melded perfectly with Salinger's writing philosophy. Salinger's highest hope was that his efforts would bring his readers not to nirvana or to heaven but to the place of self-examination. That is why the best of his works are so open-ended, so given to individual interpretation, and so powerful. Vedanta was certainly Salinger's personal inspiration. The letters we are sharing tonight help to establish that. And being so inspired, he could not avoid sharing that inspiration with the world. But Nikhilananda had taught his student well: it was not the label that mattered, it was the effect upon the soul. J D Salinger was not a missionary or a monk; he was an author, and he was an author of fiction. This was the gift that God had given him, and he served that gift, and God through it, by carefully balancing his vocation with a gentle, but clear, affirmation of faith.



## References

1. In Zen Buddhism, a riddle without a solution, used to demonstrate the inadequacy of logical reasoning and provoke sudden enlightenment.

# Women and Rites of Marriage

Rhyddhi Chakraborty

ONCE A NINE YEAR OLD GIRL refused to be married and demanded a chance to pursue her education. But her mother, being dissatisfied with her decision, brought the girl to the Holy Mother Sarada Devi to convince her, and to perhaps scold her, for being a nuisance. Instead of scolding the little girl, the Holy Mother scolded her mother for taking the decision on the girl's behalf and recommended that the girl be allowed to pursue her education, by which she could become capable of deciding her own fate, good or bad.<sup>1</sup>

This is but one example of the subordination that the majority of women in India have had to suffer from a very young age. The Holy Mother lived from 1853 to 1920, but the subordination and fate of Indian women have not improved much since then. Instead, there has been a sharp rise in crimes against women. For example, one of India's leading dailies has reported that crimes against women were on the rise in the state of West Bengal. The figures available from the State Crime Record Bureau (SCRB) stated that the crime rate had shot up by 83 per cent in 2005 as compared to 2001.<sup>2</sup> The cases were related mostly to domestic violence—dowry murder, rape, bride-burning, forcible suicide, and the like. According to the Twelfth Planning Commission's draft on the social sector, an all-India average of domestic violence is 33.5 per cent.<sup>3</sup> This sharp increase implies a lack of awareness about gender equality and the sanctity of marriage. If we present a correct picture of a woman and the rites of marriage, in the Indian context, we may contribute to a general

awareness of the importance of women's welfare within society.

## Women and Their Status

The word 'woman' is derived from the old English term *wīfman(n)*, or *wīfmon(n)*—*wīf* meaning 'wife' or 'woman', and *man(n)*, meaning 'man'<sup>4</sup> or 'human being'<sup>5</sup>. Thus, in the English language, the concept of woman is defined as subordinate to man, her reproductive functions, and her family and society. This subordination has been an important issue for the social sciences and feminism.

From the biological point of view, it is argued that the human female, like in many other species, is physically weaker than her male counterpart. It is for this reason that the male dominates the female at the physical level. The same biological determinism is operative at the psychological level, wherein certain specific tendencies are attributed to women and certain others to men. It is believed that there are necessary, unique, and exclusive qualities of men and women. For Sigmund Freud, femininity is neither inborn nor culturally conditioned, but in every culture the process of becoming a woman requires the repression of the active—masculine—side of her sexuality.<sup>6</sup> This repression almost becomes natural and inherent in women.

Other theories emphasize the social aspect of human life explaining the subordination of women in the context of the sociocultural environment. Friedrich Engels holds that women became subordinate due to the rise of the institution of private property.<sup>7</sup> Claude Levi-Strauss

states that subordination is the result of social dynamics. According to Levi-Strauss, the fundamental bonds of society are the bonds between men, or groups of men, by means of exchange of women. It is the men who exchange women and not vice-versa.<sup>8</sup> Thus the social relationship is established not between a man and a woman but between groups of men, and a woman is not a partner but an object of exchange.

In addition to these theories, the concept underlying the physiological theories is the most important and valuable, as women are invariably related to this concept through the concept of reproduction. In many Indian texts<sup>9</sup> the concepts of *bija*, seed, and *kshetra*, field, have been applied to human reproduction. The male was compared with a seed-giver and the female with the field. It was thought that the female cannot create life, just as a field or land cannot create life—as the field nourishes the seed, the female nourishes the embryo. The *bija-kshetra nyaya* is presented in the *Manusmṛti*, 9.32–52 and 10.68–70. Manu accepts that *bija* is superior to *kshetra*. A seed sown in a defective field gets destroyed without producing any result. The *Manusmṛti* speaks much of the supreme importance of *bija*.

Similar concepts were prevalent among the Greeks. Pythagoras and Aristotle explained that biologically the male is superior to the female (32). Among the Armenians the earth was thought of as a material womb, from whence men came forth. The culture and custom of recognizing the earth as mother, seeing a similarity between the two, was prevalent in ancient Greece as well. Thus one of the first theophanies of the earth, particularly of the earth as soil, was its motherhood, its inexhaustible power of fruitfulness. Smohalla, an American Indian prophet of the Umatilla tribe, forbade his followers to dig the earth, for, he said, it is a sin to wound or cut, tear or scratch our common mother by the labour of farming.<sup>10</sup>

Such a mystical devotion to the Mother Earth is not an isolated instance. In some form or other it was and is present in many other cultures. The members of a primitive Dravidian tribe of central India, the Baiga, carried on a nomadic way of agriculture, sowing only in the ashes left after part of the jungle had been burnt away, thinking it a sin to tear their mother's bosom with a plough (ibid.). In parts of Assam, Bengal, and also in the state of Odisha, on the first three days of the monsoon, Mother Earth is given total rest, as she is believed to be menstruating. During this time the rains wash part of the topsoil away making the rivers reddish in colour. This is called *ambhuvachi*, and during these three days no ploughing or farming takes place, while some fertility rites and rituals are practised only by the women.<sup>11</sup> Whatever the rituals may be, the underlying belief in these cases is that the earth emerges as a mother, giving birth to living forms that it draws out of its own substance. Through these beliefs the idea of motherhood is respected, even considered sacred, and therefore women can have their right status in society.<sup>12</sup>

With the change from hoe-agriculture to bullock-plough agriculture in the Indo-Gangetic plains, men's role in agriculture increased and women continued to be unrecognized farmers. Moreover, the spread of the concept of the *bija-kshetra*, devalued and distorted the role and function of women. Society gradually became patriarchal; males were thought of having a potency to create and provide new life. Giving life was thought of as more important than nourishing it, because nourishing consisted in helping and supplementing the growth of life, a secondary activity (ibid.). This kind of comparison between man and woman started with the advancement of civilization and the building up of societies, when people started to settle down by forming families through the institution of marriage.





Shiva taking his bride Parvati home with his wedding procession

### Beliefs in Marriage

Every culture of the world recognizes some form of marriage. In most cultures and religions neither men nor women are considered complete, after reaching maturity, without marriage. Marriage is defined as a formalized union, governed by the customs of a specific society. It has significance as a religious sacrament and as a social institution with economic, educational, and other functions crucial to the maintenance of modern societies. Anyone entering into it is linked to an extensive network of moral functions, rights, and obligations. Therefore, marriage underlies a belief.<sup>13</sup>

In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* it is said: '*Sa imam-evatmanam dvedhapatayat tatah patishcha patni chabhavatam tasmad-idam-ardhavrighalam-iva sva iti ha smah yajnavalkyah*'; He (the Divine Person) parted this very body into two. From that came husband and wife. Therefore, said Yajnavalkya, this (body) is one-half of oneself, like one of the two halves of a split pea.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, for the Hindus, marriage is a sacred institution through which men and women become one in spirit. Hindu marriage is also a social duty, and in the Vedic period it was a moral and religious obligation as well. Marriage and the grooming of male children was the only way through which a man could repay his debt to his ancestors.

Among the Zinacantecos, a Maya Indian group in Central Mexico, marriage is the only means to attain heaven at death. Marriage here takes place on two levels. It is not simply the relationship between two individuals and their families, but it is also a bond between the souls of the bride and the groom.<sup>15</sup> Among the Hopi Indians in the south-west of the US, a woman initiates a marriage and brings a husband to her father's house. The marriage is necessary for the girl's life after death. The wedding clothes that are provided by her husband's male relatives will become her shroud upon her death and will transport her spirit into the afterworld. And so, without entering marriage, one cannot truly die (ibid.).

Jewish belief traces the origin of marriage to Adam and Eve and views their union as a part of creation's fabric. The nuptial blessings emphasize marriage in the scheme of creation and speak of the state of marriage as paradise regained. As a blessing from God, Jewish marriage should not only perpetuate humankind but should also enhance and complete the partners' personal growth (*ibid.*). Christian marriage is also regarded as a sacrament. The ceremony joins the bride and groom into one spirit in union with God.

Marriage also underlies the belief in the continuation of society. The institution of marriage perpetuates society by socially recognizing the union of men and women and by incorporating their offspring into social life. There are even provisions in several cultures and religions for re-marriage in case one of the partners passes away, thus granting the continuation of the institution of family and society. The two best known forms of this are the levirate and the sororate. In the levirate, when a husband dies, an approved male relative of his may live with the widow and the children. This substitute husband will conceive more children as if he was the deceased. In the sororate, the place of a deceased wife is taken by her unmarried sister (9.219).

The Nur and Zulu societies of Africa practise 'ghost marriages,' which are of two types. If a man is engaged and dies before marriage, his fiancé should marry one of his kinsmen and conceive children for the dead man—this is similar to the levirate. A man may also 'waken' a dead relative who has never married by marrying a wife to his name and conceiving children for him. Also, among these two groups, women may 'become' men to carry on the male line. A rich woman or the eldest daughter in a family with no sons can marry another woman and become the father of her wife's children who are conceived by some male relative of the female husband (*ibid.*). The

importance of all these forms of marriage is that they allow for the perpetuation of the family line and indirectly the entire society through the existing structure of social relations.

While these forms of marriage perpetuate society through those who have died, many societies ensure their continuation into the future by marrying those individuals not yet born. Among the Tiwi of Australia a young girl is contracted for her future marriage before her birth, at her mother's wedding ceremony. When the girl enters puberty, her wedding ceremony is held. This ceremony is attended by the girl, her father, and her husband as well as her future sons-in-laws (*ibid.*).

Another form of belief in the institution of marriage is that it creates an alliance and helps social integration. Marriage is the starting point for the kinship ties that run across and between different and independent kinship or descent groups. Such marriages are used to create an alliance between two lines of descent with very little focus upon the relationship between the bride and groom. In many cases these are arranged marriages, often making an agreement between the two families. Love is not a requirement here, but the affection that develops after many years of successful marriage is a product of that marriage.

Among the Georgian Jews, when a dowry is unavailable, a love marriage may take place by elopement, the legitimacy of which is later recognized if the match appears to be successful.

In the final category of marriage beliefs, marriage represents a gift, or a system of exchange of women between two descent groups. The position of giving or receiving wives sets up a mechanism, by which status is expressed and validated, between the two kinship groups. The ideal exchange is for both descent groups to exchange sisters, thereby acknowledging the status of each group to be equal.

When women are not exchanged equally, the balance between the two groups remains unequal and the equality must be achieved through other means: payments made by the husband to the family who has given him the wife. These payments are viewed as equivalent to the reproductive powers of the woman, who is being given to another group, as well as a return on the labour and usefulness that the bride's family will lose upon her marriage. These payments are known as 'bride-price' or 'bride-wealth'. Thus, in some societies, women are the medium of exchange by which powers can be gained and shown. Service may be used as bride-price or may even be combined with bride-wealth payments. To repay the bride's family for the loss of a daughter, the groom will serve his in-laws for an agreed period of time. In the Hebrew scripture, for example, this type of service is described in *Genesis* 29, which tells of Jacob's service to his father-in-law for seven years, for each of his wives, Leah and Rachael.

Marriage as a system of exchange is prevalent in modern societies in some form or other. Of these, the most popular form is that of the dowry. It is not the opposite of bride-price, rather, it is generally viewed as her share of the family inheritance. In some instances, however, the dowry may closely resemble the practice of paying bride-price, as it takes place in marriages in India and Sri Lanka. Most Hindu marriages are traditionally made between members of the same caste and no dowries are given. However, when a girl marries into a higher caste, she should be accompanied by a substantial dowry as a symbolic payment for her movement to a higher status. This practice is known as hypergamy.

Exchange relationships at marriage may be composed primarily through the flow of gifts between families, and frequently these expenses will be about equal on both sides. The power of the

gift is not only in the object gifted but in the relationship that lie behind gifts. It is the exchange itself that is essential to the completion and success of a marriage. This exchange of gifts is often an important part of the religious ceremony of marriage. Alas! It is often misunderstood and the true purpose of marriage is mistaken.

(To be concluded)

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# ***India's Contribution to the World***

**Brahmachari  
Suvimalachaitanya**



IMAGE: SEATED BUDDHA (5TH CENT. TAN SANDSTONE) / ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM, SARNATH

**I**NDIA'S CONTRIBUTION to world civilization has been large, and will be larger in the future. As time passes, paradoxically, India's contributions are being more and more revealed and acknowledged. This is preparing the ground for her future right to serve the world. Those who look from the economic,

military, or other angles completely miss out India's presence, because she is almost absent in these areas. But looked from the spiritual angle India's contribution is vast. Humankind is moving towards its higher spiritual destiny and it is from this perspective that she is and will be important.

### India's Influence

Swami Vivekananda said about India's contribution: 'India's contribution to the sum total of human knowledge has been spirituality, philosophy. These she contributed even long before the rising of the Persian Empire; the second time was during the Persian Empire; for the third time during the ascendancy of the Greeks; and now for the fourth time during the ascendancy of the English, she is going to fulfil the same destiny once more.'<sup>1</sup>

Sylvain Levy, the eminent French scholar, said about India's influence:

From Persia to the Chinese sea, from the icy regions of Siberia to the islands of Java and Borneo, from Oceania to Socotra, India has propagated her beliefs, her tales, and her civilization. She has left indelible imprints on one-fourth of the human race in the course of a long succession of centuries. She has the right to reclaim in universal history the rank that ignorance has refused her for a long time and to hold her place amongst the great nations summarizing and symbolizing the spirit of Humanity.<sup>2</sup>

Every nation has its distinctive feature and this makes for the vast diversity of humankind. India's distinctive feature is its teaching that life is essentially spiritual. It is true that no civilization has ever lived and thrived without a spiritual basis, for civilization has no meaning without the control of the baser impulses and a concern for others as well as the environment. But those civilizations that aimed primarily at increasing their dominance, thirsting for power and pleasure, inevitably died out. The craze for power and material supremacy brings in its train wars of conquest, exploitation, subjugation of other races, and mutual conflict among conquering nations. Ceaseless striving for material satisfaction never brings satisfaction but spurs people to more external conquests till they simply exhaust themselves to become prey to other conquering people.

E J Urwick, in his remarkable book *The Message of Plato*, traced the major ideas of Plato to Indian philosophy.<sup>3</sup> Richard Garbe, regarded as the greatest authority on Sankhya philosophy in Europe, held the view that Sankhyan ideas have exerted great influence on the doctrines of Heraclitus, Empedocles, Anaxagoras, Democritus, and Epicurus.<sup>4</sup> Moriz Winternitz was convinced that Pythagoras was influenced by Sankhya philosophy, and that the Gnostic and the Neo-Platonist philosophers took up many Indian philosophical ideas.<sup>5</sup>

Max Müller argued that Pythagoras came in touch with some brahmanas in Persia, if not in India, and that his famous theorem is found in the *Shulba Sutra* of Bodhayana.<sup>6</sup> And it is said that he received the ideas of the science of music, the importance of the numbers, and the existence of the fifth element from India (ibid.). The Pythagoreans regarded spitting before fire as a grievous sin, and they abstained from beans—both of these are Vedic conventions (ibid.). Henry T Colebrooke said that the doctrines of Pythagoras were rooted in India (ibid.).

Plotinus is known to have travelled to the East and to have come in contact with Indian philosophers.<sup>7</sup> Indian philosophers have again and again emphasized the idea that the Absolute, which is also the Infinite, cannot be apprehended by the finite human mind, nor expressed in the limited human speech. One of the ways of understanding the absolute Reality, in Indian philosophy, is by the process of elimination, '*neti neti*; not this, not this', which also constitutes the central idea in the philosophy of Plotinus, who said: 'We can say what it is not, but we cannot say what it is.'<sup>8</sup> He further stated:

When we say ... that He is above being, we do not say that He is this or that. We affirm nothing; we do not give Him any name. ... We do not try to understand Him: it would in fact be

laughable to try to understand that incomprehensible nature. But we ... do not know what to call Him. ... Even the name of the One expresses no more than the negation of His plurality. The problem must be given up, and research fall into silence. What is the good of seeking when further progress is impossible? ... If we wish to speak of God, or to conceive him, let us give up everything. When this has been done ... let us examine rather whether there is still not something to be given up.<sup>9</sup>

There is also evidence of the presence of Indian thinkers in Athens as early as the fourth century BCE. One Indian met Socrates and asked him what the scope of his philosophy was. 'Replied Socrates, "an enquiry into human phenomenon." This reply drew from the Indian a diffident query who exclaimed, "How can a man enquire into human phenomena when he is ignorant of divine ones?"'<sup>10</sup>

Alexander the Great came to India's western region in 327 BCE, conquering all the countries on his way. It seems he had a secret desire to come in touch with India's philosophic and spiritual thought because Aristotle, his teacher, has asked him to obtain a teacher from India. Greek historians have preserved the episode of his meeting with an Indian sage in Punjab. Swami Ranganathananda narrated it thus:

The Emperor went to meet him and, impressed by his talk with him, invited him to accompany him to Greece. The sage declined the invitation. The Emperor persuaded and pressed him. Still he did not accept. Then asserting his position as the Emperor, Alexander drew his sword and threatened to kill him if he did not obey his behest. At this, the sage burst into a laughter. When the Emperor asked the reason for his laughter and whether he was not afraid of his sword, the sage replied that this was the most foolish thing that he had ever said in his life;

that he, the Emperor of the material world, could never kill him, since he was not the body but the spirit, eternal and ever free, which no fire could burn, no water could wet, and no weapons could pierce. And for once, in his all-conquering career, the Emperor came across a person who did not fear him. The whole world feared him; the whole world bent down before him; but he saw this one man in India before him who stood calm, and fearless of all the material power represented by this Emperor.<sup>11</sup>

The thought of the third century Alexandrian philosopher Ammonius Saccas reflects Indian inspiration. He met Indians and had his initiation into yoga, of which he became master.<sup>12</sup> It may be noted that the disciplines he practised were unknown in Alexandria at that time. 'Ammonius, the master, made such an impression on his times by his great wisdom and knowledge that he was known as the "god-taught"; he was more than a mere eclectic; he himself attained to spiritual insight. The pupil Plotinus also shows all the signs of a student of the eastern Rāja Yoga, the "kingly art" of the science of the soul.'<sup>13</sup>

In so far as religious thought is concerned, India's contribution to the development of Muslim mysticism is beyond doubt. That was the time when the Christian canon was taking shape, and nearer India, in Iran, the Magian Zoroastrian revival was beginning to take shape under the Sassanian dynasty. Under the second monarch of that dynasty, Shapur I, who ruled from 241 to 272 CE, we find that 'The King of Kings Shapur son of Ardashir further collected those writings of the Religion that were dispersed throughout India, the Byzantine Empire, and other lands, and which treated of medicine, astronomy, movement, time, space, substance, creation, becoming, passing away, qualitative change, logic and other arts and sciences.'<sup>14</sup>



It is not only that Indian works on science, mathematics, and astronomy were translated into Arabic, but also works on Indian philosophy and religion, particularly during the 'Abbasid period, specially in the reigns of Al-Manşūr and Harun Al-Rashīd'. Islamic ideas dovetailing harmoniously with Indian ones became solidified in the Sufis when 'Hindu monistic pantheism developed an artistic religious symbolism and imagery for human-cum-divine love.'<sup>15</sup>

### **Western Studies of Indian Scriptures**

British archaeologists, under the leadership of Sir Flinders Petrie, excavated Memphis, the ancient capital of Egypt, and discovered many statues that seem Indian in origin. Petrie concluded that these statues proved the existence of an Indian colony in ancient Egypt about 500 BCE. One of the statues is of an Indian seated cross-legged in deep meditation, like a yogi. It is surmised that ideas of asceticism, which were unknown in ancient Egypt, and what appeared in Egypt about this time must have been due to contact with Indians.<sup>16</sup>

The historian John Pentland Mahaffy stated: 'The Buddhist missionaries were the forerunners of the Christ. Philosophers, like Schelling and Schopenhauer, and the Christian thinkers, like Dean Mansel and D Milman, admit that the Essene and the Therapeutaes arose through the influence of Buddhist missionaries who had come from India during the reign of Ashoka.'<sup>17</sup> Swami Abhedananda commented that the Essenes belonged to a tantric order of India and owed their name to Ishani, the Sanskrit appellation of the tantric goddess Durga.<sup>18</sup>

The Upanishads are the culmination of Vedic ideas and present a philosophy that is a bold enquiry into the nature of existence. A collection of them was translated into Persian in 1656 and into Latin in 1801. The German

philosopher Schopenhauer wrote: 'There is no study more beneficial and elevating to humanity than the study of the Upanishads. It has been the solace of my life and it will be the solace of my death.'<sup>19</sup>

The philosophy of the Upanishads was simplified and rearranged in the Bhagavadgita. The English philosopher Carlyle studied it and then recommended it to Emerson. The study of the Upanishads and the Gita was a favourite with Emerson and had a marked influence on his writings. For example, his poem 'Brahm' is almost a literal translation of parts of the Gita. In his own poetic style, Thoreau, the New England thinker, writes: 'What extracts from the Vedas I have read fall on me like the light of a higher and purer luminary ... like the full moon after the stars have come out' (ibid.).

Indian influence in America began with the Transcendentalists of Concord, of whom Emerson was the leader and Thoreau a devoted supporter. Emerson was the first great American who said: 'I owed ... a magnificent day to the Bhagavad-Gītā. It was the first of books; it was as if an empire spoke to us, nothing small or unworthy, but large, serene, consistent, the voice of an old intelligence which in another age and climate had pondered and thus disposed of the same questions that exercise us.'<sup>20</sup> After reading Manu, Thoreau said: 'I cannot read a sentence in the book of the Hindoos without being elevated as upon the tableland of the Ghauts. It has such a rhythm as the winds of the desert, such a tide as the Ganges, and is as superior to criticism as the Himmaleh Mounts.'<sup>21</sup> Leon Roth of the Hebrew University said that 'India has always implied for the world at large the inward light of the spirit; and this light is more needed today because of the dark mists of scientific barbarism which seems to be closing in upon the world from all sides.'<sup>22</sup>

Dr Jean Filliozat of the College de France, Paris, in his recent studies on the external cultural relations of ancient India, believes that the Upanishads had an influence on the thought of the Middle East in the first centuries of the Christian era. Dr S Radhakrishnan devoted several chapters of his book *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* to a masterly discussion of the spiritual and cultural relations between India and Greece, and India and Palestine.<sup>23</sup> The French Indologist Louis Renou viewed India as 'the repository of the noblest spiritual tradition, the only one in the whole world which has been alive throughout the centuries.'<sup>24</sup>

Dr Kenneth Walker, the eminent English thinker, presiding over the Sri Ramakrishna Birth Anniversary meeting in London, in March 1949, said: 'India, the greatest spiritual force of the world, even maintains today those fountain sources of eternal life, which are the only hope of the spiritual resurrection of humanity.'<sup>25</sup>

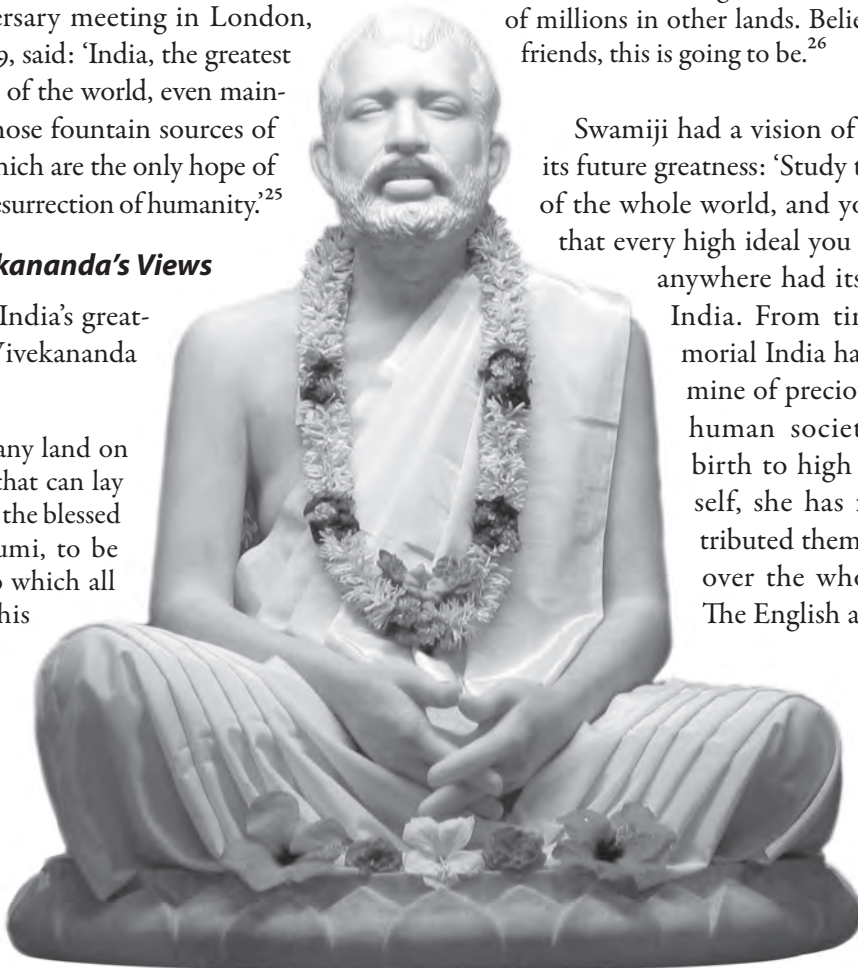
### Swami Vivekananda's Views

Referring to India's greatness Swami Vivekananda affirmed:

If there is any land on this earth that can lay claim to be the blessed *Punya Bhumi*, to be the land to which all souls on this


earth must come to account for Karma, the land to which every soul that is wending its way Godward must come to attain its last home, the land where humanity has attained its highest towards gentleness, towards generosity, towards purity, towards calmness, above all, the land of introspection and of spirituality—it is India. Hence have started the founders of religions from the most ancient times, deluging the earth again and again with the pure and perennial waters of spiritual truth. Hence have proceeded the tidal waves of philosophy that have covered the earth, East or West, North or South, and hence again must start the wave which is going to spiritualise the material civilisation of the world. Here is the life-giving water with which must be quenched the burning fire of materialism which is burning the core of the hearts of millions in other lands. Believe me, my friends, this is going to be.'<sup>26</sup>

Swamiji had a vision of India and its future greatness: 'Study the history of the whole world, and you will see that every high ideal you meet with anywhere had its origin in India. From time immemorial India has been the mine of precious ideas to human society; giving birth to high ideas herself, she has freely distributed them broadcast over the whole world. The English are in India



today, to gather those higher ideals, to acquire a knowledge of the Vedanta, to penetrate into the deep mysteries of that eternal religion which is yours' (5.355).

Will Durant, the eminent American thinker and historian, in his book *The Case for India*, published in 1931 but banned by the British Government of India, almost echoes Swamiji's words:

India was the motherland of our race, and Sanskrit the mother of Europe's languages: she was the mother of our philosophy; mother, through the Arabs, of much of our mathematics; mother, through the Buddha, of the ideals embodied in Christianity; mother, through the village community, of self-government and democracy. Mother India is in many ways the mother of us all. Nothing should more deeply shame the modern student than the recency and inadequacy of his acquaintance with India. ... This is the India that patient scholarship is now opening up like a new intellectual continent to that Western mind which only yesterday thought civilization an exclusive Western thing.<sup>27</sup> 

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# Eternal Words

## Swami Adbhutananda

Compiled by Swami Siddhananda; translated by Swami Sarvadevananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

ONLY AFTER DOING spiritual practices and realizing the Truth in his own life, did Swami Vivekananda give spiritual instructions. He said: 'Let me realize first, then I shall explain it to you. One cannot explain to others, unless one understands it oneself.' But nowadays I see that people have become such that without themselves understanding first, they want to explain things to others. By reading a few books they think they've understood everything. They have no sadhana. My dear, you first understand; then and then only can you make others understand! Because of Swamiji's realization people accepted his message. What qualifications do you have? Why will people listen to you? Only that one can be a teacher who has earned official certification—these are the Master's words. Swamiji earned it. The Master gave it to him. All of these people lack 'certification', yet they go forward to become teachers, and so they fall. Their ego suddenly puffs up.

### Swami Vivekananda

Swamiji was very intelligent in every action. He did everything flawlessly and attained success. Without God's special grace, such qualities don't manifest.

Ramchandra Datta took Swamiji along with him to see the Master. The moment Swamiji arrived the Master stood up and went into ecstasy. Ram Babu told Swamiji: 'Seeing you he went into ecstasy.' After that the Master would, from time to time, talk about Swamiji and would

become restless to see him. He would send people to enquire about how Swamiji was. He would repeatedly send earnest requests in order to see Swamiji at least once. Only the Master knew who Swamiji was. That is why he used to be so restless for him. He used to say: 'I have pulled him down to this Earth for the sake of my work.'

One day Swamiji became unconscious as soon as the Master put his hand on his chest. Swamiji cried out saying: 'What are you doing! What are you doing! I have my mother and father!' The Master said: 'Let it be, let it be. He is the right person to receive it. This is not his samskaras but that of his parents.'

A house full of eminent people like Keshab Sen and others would be seated, and even in front of them the Master would tell Swamiji: 'I don't want anybody if I am with you.'

The Master used to say: 'He is great in every aspect; there is no imperfection at all. As he is to look at; he is equally expert in singing and playing instruments, in speaking and conversing, in understanding and conveying that understanding—he is exceedingly pure; and he never even knows what untruth is like.'

The Master would not ask Mother Kali for any material thing for anybody, but he would ask for her to increase their devotion. One day Swamiji said: 'I know that you cannot pray to Mother Kali for money and the like, but provoked by Bhisma, even Sri Krishna had to take up the chakra [discus]. Similarly, you will have to pray to Mother Kali for me. I would not have

requested this of you, but what shall I do? I can no longer see the sufferings of my brothers and sisters.' Becoming happy, the Master said: 'Alright, you go to the Mother and ask whatever you wish.' Swamiji went to the Kali temple, but his mind became such that he started weeping and continued praying: 'Grant me discernment and renunciation.' After he came back weeping and weeping, the Master said: 'What did you ask for?' Swamiji said: 'I asked for discernment and renunciation.' The Master was pleased and said: 'I know you are not capable of asking for money and the like.' After that, the Master said: 'Go home. With Mother's grace your family will never lack coarse food and clothing.' Later the Master happily told others: 'See, Naren's brothers and sisters are suffering from shortage of food, but in spite of that he went and asked Mother Kali for discernment and renunciation.'

Day and night Swamiji's heart would cry for God. Nobody could then understand that. The Master realized this. One day Swamiji was crying loudly. The Master understood why he was weeping. He called Swamiji and told him: 'You are weeping for samadhi?' Swamiji said: 'Yes.' Then the Master said: 'I shall give it to you alone; but first you work for me, take trouble for me. I have taken so much trouble for you for so many days; now you labour for me. The amount of austerities I did for you, you do only one sixteenth of that. I will give you a very comfortable bed.'

Swamiji once ran away to Bodh Gaya. The brother disciples, being very anxious, reported this to the Master. The Master said: 'There is nothing anywhere else. Everything is here. Don't worry.' Saying so, he drew a line. Swamiji came back within a day or two.

After the passing away of the Master everyone would tell Swamiji: 'The Master spoke so highly of you, did you understand anything of that?'

Swamiji used to say: 'He spoke highly of me. I greatly respect that statement. But until now I have not understood that. Let me understand first, then I shall make all of you understand.'

Many of the brother disciples had gone back home. Swamiji got hold of them and brought them back one by one and said: 'He used to love you so much; was that only for leading a worldly life?' In this way he gradually pulled them all back.

There was a play at the Brahmo Samaj. In that play Swamiji dressed like a sadhu. The Master had gone to see that very play. When Swamiji appeared on stage in the garb of a sadhu, the Master suddenly stood up and repeatedly asked Swamiji to come down in his costume. Seeing Swamiji hesitate, Keshab Babu said: 'Why not come down when he is saying so?' Thereafter, when Swamiji came near him, the Master held his hand and in an intoxicated mood said: 'This is right, this is right.'

One day the Master said to Keshab Babu: 'See Keshab, you have a great power for lecturing. My Naren has eighteen such powers.' Keshab Babu enjoyed it very much and said: 'That is very good what you said. I also want that. Why will Naren be lesser than me?' The Master said: 'Look, there is not a speck of jealousy in Keshab.'

The Master did not forbid Swamiji from eating and drinking whatever he wanted. He himself used to feed Swamiji delicious food saying: 'He will have to work hard.'

The Master would not ask or allow Swamiji to prepare tobacco or fetch water for his washing or such things. He used to say: 'Others are there to do all that work.' The Master knew that greater works would be done through Swamiji.

Swamiji would practise japa and meditation the entire night. He also gave joy to the brother disciples by singing and playing instruments. Sharat Maharaj [Swami Saradananda] and many

others learnt singing and playing instruments from Swamiji.

After the passing away of the Master everyone started saying: 'What "mad" behaviour the Master exhibited (towards Naren)!' Swamiji's power became manifest in Chicago. Then everybody started saying: 'The Master's prediction was exactly right.'

When Swamiji returned to India from that country, Mr Sevier, Mr Goodwin, and others were with him. I went to see him. I was thinking that having some Western disciples Swamiji had become proud. Understanding my thoughts and holding my hands, Swamiji said: 'You are that very brother of mine Latu, and I am your very Naren.' Then I understood that Swamiji had developed the power to see inside men, yet he had not the least trace of ego in him.

Swamiji said: 'Come, let us sit and eat. You also sit on one side. I am talking to the Bengalis. See how euphoric they are.' After eating he said: 'Did you see, they collected all the worthless news about that country, but they didn't ask for any news about him by whose grace all of this great work was done. Brother, I am astonished. I didn't know that such huge work could possibly have been accomplished through me.'

After returning from the West he immediately gave up his Western attire. He again started using a two-rupee shawl and two-and-a-half-rupee shoes. Such great honour—he threw it all away! If anyone came to Swamiji in despair, if he could do nothing else, he at least gave them joy by singing a few songs.

Swamiji's love for his brother disciples was next to that of the Master's. Whatever you see accomplished here, everything was accomplished through Swamiji.

The Master told Swamiji: 'Surely, he [God] listens to sincere prayers.' Swamiji asked the Master: 'Sir, can one see God?' The Master said: 'Yes.

In the same way I am speaking with you, exactly in the same way that one can see him, touch him, and speak with him.'

Oh my dear! Can anyone and everyone become like Swamiji? If so, there would be no worries. How often does such a person take birth! Think for a moment what great work Swamiji did! You people merely imitate him. What? Can that bring any spiritual development? But you don't try to copy his genuine characteristics. Your trouble begins from that point alone. How much austerity Swamiji performed! The Master himself made him do it. We have seen this with our own eyes. Did he become great for nothing? The Master used to say: 'I brought him here to do my work.' Again, comparing Swamiji with everyone, he used to say: 'I see all others like a tiny oil lamp. Someone is like a big candle. At the most someone is like a bright star. But my Naren is like the sun. Before him all others pale in comparison.'

It is indescribable how much the Master loved Swamiji. He used to say: 'He will have to do much work; if he doesn't eat a little, how will he manage?' Moreover, he would say: 'In him the fire of knowledge is burning, whatever he eats, all of it will be digested. No food can harm him.' That is why we saw that the Master would not allow anybody to eat food brought by certain businessmen, but he would give it to Swamiji. And he would explain this to all of us for our understanding. One day, while meat was being cooked, the Master strolled over and said: 'Hey, what is going on?' Someone answered: 'Meat is being cooked; Naren will eat it.' Hearing this, he didn't say anything more. He knew it would not harm Swamiji at all.

Observe the life of the Master and Swamiji and try to follow their teachings. The teachings of the Master, as simple as they may appear to you, are not so easy to understand. They are intensely profound. We didn't understand that



much before. He used to give his advice and we used to listen, but we didn't understand what profound meaning there was in it. It was Swamiji alone who explained that to us. When Swamiji explained what depth of meaning there was in the Master's teachings, we were astounded. We heard the Master's teachings ourselves, but there were so many implications in them; we couldn't comprehend them for a moment. That is why I say, listen to the teachings of the Master and study the life of Swamiji. That will benefit you.

One day the Master went to Naren's house to see him. I was with him. Naren said: 'I was going out when you approached the intersection of Tala. Then I saw you. That is why I didn't go out.' Hearing this, the Master said: 'Don't tell these things to anybody.' Swamiji attained this state by doing meditation. He could see everything. He knew what others were doing at a distance.

The Vaishnavas repeat the name of Nitai a lot. They say: 'Nitai, the bestower of love has come.' They are right to say so. At the command of Sri Chaitanya, Nitai distributed love from door to door. When Jagai and Madhai struck him with pieces of an earthen pitcher, his blood flowed profusely; yet he was totally unaware of that, he kept dancing in ecstatic love. While dancing he said: 'You have done well by hitting me, repeat once the name of Hari and come dancing towards me.' In a similar way, you repeat the name of Naren also. Because, if Naren had not been there, who could have fathomed the Master? He alone rightly understood the Master. He alone explained the Master to everyone else. That brought great good to others.

Swamiji explained to everyone: 'The only goal of life is to realize God. It will be extremely good if one can realize him. If one does not realize him, at least one will be able to spend one's life filled with purity. Apart from that, there is so much sin and suffering in the world. At least

one will be able to escape all of that. To spend a life filled with purity is itself a great achievement. The scriptures have also proclaimed that a life filled with purity is the only means of attaining him.

One day Swamiji smilingly said: 'See, I have spread his name throughout Europe and America; the Westerners are also accepting our religion. Oh Latu, what do you say?' I said: 'Swamiji, what more new things have you done? What Shankaracharya and Buddha taught before, you have only retraced their marks. You have done nothing more than that.' Swamiji said: 'You spoke rightly. You spoke rightly.'

Some rich beautiful lady in America wanted to marry Swamiji. Swamiji said: 'What are you saying! I am a monk. To me, all women are like my own mother. I am a brahmachari. Can I marry? Moreover, my guru never touched women or gold.' See what great restraint, what great renunciation!

I used to live in Swamiji's monastery. Swamiji made a rule: everyone will have to exercise with dumb-bells. I thought, again, what is this new idea he is enforcing! I said that I will not be able to exercise with your dumb-bells. Swamiji started laughing.

Someone said: 'People say, you love Narendra. That is why, out of ego, his feet never touch the ground.' The Master said: 'That is not ego, that is valour. His mind does not come down at all.'

If I say, I shall be like Swami Vivekananda and someone points out my actions, where do I stand? How can I become great like Swamiji? In the time it would take for me to become great, by that time he would become greater still. That is why the difference between him and me will forever remain the same. Of course, if I could have gone faster, doubling my speed, then in time, by chance, I could have caught up with him. But that is a far cry. Next to the Master,

no one amongst us did such severe austerities as Swamiji did.

### **Keshabchandra Sen**

Keshab Sen, who was such a great man that he received honour from Queen Victoria, still used to sit before the Master with folded palms. What great faith he had in the Master's words! He was not egotistic. After being told by the Master to perform the worship of Shiva, he did so.

Keshab babu had great trust in the Master's words. He knew that if only he could obey him, it would bring him much benefit. One day, while talking with him, the Master became silent. Keshab said: 'Please say something more.' The Master said: 'If I say any more, your followers will break away.' Then he said: 'Let it rest here.' Keshab knew that if the Master said anything more, his mind would change and he would not be able to hold his congregation.

The Master said: 'Keshab had a wish to obtain fame.' One day he told Keshab Sen: 'Say something about religion.' Keshab said: 'Before you, what more shall I say! Taking your very words and expounding them more and more I feel joy myself, and also I give joy to others.'

When Keshab lectured at Beadon Park, the elders would say: 'The Brahmo Keshab has come.' While speaking about God, he would himself swim in tears and make others weep as well. Thereafter the elders used to say: 'Everything Keshab said was correct.'

The Master once went to the Belgharia garden of the Brahmos. Keshab babu was seated with his devotees. While talking, the Master said: 'Keshab's tail has fallen off.' Hearing that, the Brahmos became annoyed. But Keshab told them: 'Keep quiet; there is meaning in this statement.'

Keshab worshipped the Master with flowers at his own house. It is he who used to write about

the Master in the Brahmo publication. Reading that, the public came to know about the Master, and many of his disciples also came to him.

Ramchandra Datta used to hold a celebration in the Master's honour. One day Keshab babu told Ram: 'Ram, this happens rarely; one needs to salute him from a distance keeping him in a glass case. This is not a matter for rough handling.'

Observing Keshab meditate, the Master said: 'His float is bobbing,' meaning that he was having the right type of meditation.

With a newspaper in hand, Yogin Maharaj [Swami Yogananda] came to the Master's room and saluted him. The Master asked: 'Where are you coming from?' Yogin Maharaj said: 'From Dakshineswar. I am the son of so and so.' The people of Dakshineswar did not understand the Master. With astonishment, the Master said: 'How do you know about this place?' Yogin Maharaj said: 'They have written about you in Keshab babu's paper.' Hearing that, one day he told Keshab: 'Am I a modern monk begging for praise? What you have written has been done. Don't write any more.'

Occasionally, the Master used to ask Keshab babu: 'How many are attending the Brahmo Samaj?' Keshab Babu said: 'Sir, by your grace the Samaj is overflowing.' At that time such a huge crowd used to gather!

Keshab babu did not become a Brahmo in order to earn money. In those days there was no dharma in Hindu society. That is why he became a Brahmo. From an early age he had a great interest in dharma. The Master acknowledged Keshab as a genuinely religious person. What a great power. A single man overwhelmed the world! Keshab had many followers. They are living even now. A great many people were saved by his company and became religious.

*(To be continued)*

# Svarajya Siddhih: Attaining Self-dominion

Gangadharendra Saraswati

Translated from Sanskrit and annotated by Swami Narasimhananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

नाचैतन्यातप्रधानं प्रभवति चलितुं तन्निसर्गक्रियं चेत्  
नित्यं सर्गप्रसङ्गो नियतिरपि यतः सर्गपूर्वा न पूर्वम् ।  
बन्धो निर्हेतुकः स्यात्कथमथ न भवेद्बन्धमोक्षाव्यवस्था  
निःसौख्यं नापि मोक्षं स्पृहयति मतिमान्कापिलं तेन दुष्टम्  
॥ १७ ॥

The *pradhāna* is incapable of creating (this universe) because it is not conscious. If *prakṛti* is (held to be) by nature active, then the process of creation will go on forever (and there will be no dissolution). If the *adrṣṭa* (the invisible effect of actions) is (held to be) the cause of the universe, (that too cannot be) because it is not present before creation. (The *puruṣa*) is free from bondage and it cannot be the cause and how will not there be the absence of liberation? No intelligent person likes such liberation devoid of bliss. (Thus) the stand of Kapila is flawed (and hence cannot be accepted).

HERE THE SANKHYA SCHOOL of Kapila is being quashed. Before entering into the argument for setting aside the conclusions of this school, it will be helpful to go through the basic concepts of *puruṣa*, *prakṛti*, and the three *guṇas*.

## The Soul of Sankhya

Sankhya philosophy is dualistic and posits two principles: *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*. *Puruṣas* can be loosely called souls and are many. They do not have any parts and qualities. They may occupy a big or a small body, but remain the same

themselves. The body they occupy does not change their size, they do not expand or contract. They are all-pervasive. Though they occupy a body, they are not limited or contained by it. The experiences of this soul with respect to a body are stored in the mind. Any mental activity taking place in this mind is due to the relation of the body and the soul, *puruṣa*, and is its experience. Had there not been many *puruṣas*, when one took birth, all would have been born, and when one died, all would have died. This does not happen, and so it is only logical that there should be many *puruṣas*. It is very difficult to understand the nature of *puruṣa*, but this should be understood properly to attain the goal envisaged by Sankhya philosophy. *Puruṣa* does not have any qualities. It is of the nature of pure and absolute Consciousness, *cit*. However, it is not of the nature of pure intelligence and bliss. Bliss is just a kind of pleasure in Sankhya and a quality of *prakṛti*, not of *puruṣa*. *Puruṣas* are many and each one of them is real.

According to Sankhya, the knowledge we obtain of things are images or pictures in our mind. The object of knowledge, which is external, is a material thing. This knowledge produces an impression on the mind. This impression is also material because it is limited in its nature, just like the object of which it is an impression. The knowledge or the information



received through sense-perception is the likeness of the respective object, just like a painting or a photograph. The external object is matter and its knowledge is also matter. However, there is a difference in the degree of its grossness. While the external object is gross matter, its likeness produced in the mind out of sense-perception of this object is subtle matter. The images of the external objects appear conscious to us in the mind. They appear so because they are in contact with a principle of Consciousness, which is connected to the entire mind always and causes the experience of the person. However, we are generally unaware of this conscious principle that is behind every act of sense-perception and gives the semblance of Consciousness to all our experiences and their impressions stored in our mind. This conscious principle, often called the 'self' is beyond our grasp. It cannot be found through the impressions in the mind, because it is distinct and separate from these impressions. It is a transcendent principle and its real nature is behind and beyond the subtle matter of knowledge. All our perceptions are different constructs of the subtle substance that the mind is made up of.

What happens in the process of knowledge can be compared to a film projected from the projector-room, which is dark. Individually, one by one, a frame of the film is projected and put in front of light that illuminates it. In rapid succession this gives the semblance of a motion picture and we see objects and persons moving on the screen. They are being generated from stationary films, which are in darkness, moved in front of a light source. The *puruṣa* is like the light source, without which we cannot get any knowledge. All motion and appearances are qualities of matter, and so is their knowledge. How do we perceive them as moving and conscious? There is a principle separated from these

material objects that gives them the semblance of life. This principle is conscious and is so intertwined with matter that it cannot be distinctly perceived. However, we can infer its presence in all our sense-perceptions. This principle of Consciousness does not move, has no form or quality, and is pure. The movement of the external objects or their mental impressions takes place with this principle of Consciousness in the background, and all these objects and the impressions get illuminated. Now, every knowledge or sense-perception can be divided, so to say, into two parts: the part that gives us the idea of something being conscious and the part of the content of the knowledge or the object of the knowledge. So, when we perceive an object, we come to know of the content of the object and also of its life-like consciousness, either externally or internally, in our mind. The content is the material aspect of the object, and the life-like consciousness is the light of the *puruṣa* coming through the object. So, whenever there is a perception of an object, we perceive our self. The difficulty is that we are unable to differentiate or separate this part of consciousness and understand its source, the *puruṣa*.

Just because the 'self' is beyond our grasp, it does not mean that it is not real. It is very much real, but it is also transcendent, and that is why is beyond our reach. The objects we perceive are by themselves, diverse, incoherent, and unintelligent. The principle of Consciousness binds all our perceptions and gives them a unity. So, all the knowledge we acquire is bound and unified in the mind and thus become the coherent, systematic, and seemingly intelligent experience of a person. This coherence and semblance of intelligence is brought about by the contact with the principle of Consciousness, the *puruṣa*. In other words, all our sense-perceptions do not make 'sense' without the principle of Consciousness

in the background. This principle gives sense to all our perception and their sum total becomes experience. According to Sankhya, every individual has a *puruṣa* distinct and separate from that of the other individual. This *puruṣa* is of the nature of pure intelligence.

### **The Triad of Subtle Entities**

There are three types of ultimate subtle entities in Sankhya, and this triad is called *guṇas*. Generally, the Sanskrit word *guṇa* means 'quality'. However, here it has a different meaning. *Guṇas* are substances and not qualities. In Sankhya there is nothing such as a separate quality, and every quality is actually a substance. A subtle substance appears in a particular way, and this appearance is what we generally call quality. So, contrary to the general understanding, things or substances do not possess qualities, but qualities are different reactions of the substance. Whenever we perceive a quality, we actually perceive a particular reaction of a subtle substance. As we saw earlier, the external objects of perception and their impressions on the mind are in essence matter and have many similarities. In the case of qualities too they are similar. So, a quality stored in the mind, or a mental quality, is nothing but a particular reaction of an object stored in the mind. In Sankhya these subtle entities are called *guṇas* because they undergo various modifications and appear as qualities.

The Sanskrit word *guṇa* also means 'rope'. Sankhya's *guṇas* can also be called ropes because they are twines that bind the *puruṣa* to objects and their mental impressions. The other meaning of the word *guṇa* is 'a thing of secondary importance'. This meaning also holds good for Sankhya's *guṇas* because they are constantly modified and changed by various permutations and combinations and are not primary and

constant beyond modification like the *puruṣa*. Also, the *guṇas* are subtle substances that are matter and are definitely secondary to the conscious *puruṣa*. However, *guṇas* are permanent and cannot be destroyed. They are substantive entities or subtle substances and not abstract qualities. They are infinite but are broadly classified into three types, based upon their three main characteristics: *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. *Sattva* means 'real' or that which exists and is behind the process of manifestation of objects through Consciousness. It is goodness and causes pleasure. It has the characteristics of luminosity, lightness, buoyancy, and is illuminating. Its colour is white. The luminosity of light, the reflective power, any upward movement, pleasure, happiness, contentment, and bliss are caused by *sattva*. Generally, *sattva* is considered to be the *guṇa* of intelligence. *Rajas* is characterized by activity and is the principle of motion. Its literal meaning is 'foulness'; *rajas* produces pain. It results in restless activity, feverish effort, and wild stimulation. Its colour is red. It is considered to be the *guṇa* of energy. *Tamas* literally means 'darkness' and is the principle of inertia. It causes apathy and indifference. It results in ignorance, sloth, confusion, bewilderment, passivity, and negativity. It is heavy and enveloping and in these respects is the exact opposite of *sattva*. It is opposite to *rajas* in that it stops activity. Its colour is black. It is considered to be the *guṇa* of obstruction, mass, or matter.

These three *guṇas* are constituents of *prakṛti* and are never separate but together in different proportions. Different substances show different qualities because of different proportions of these *guṇas* in them. These *guṇas* have effects among themselves, and thus their proportions keep on changing thereby producing new qualities and substances. There is continuous

compounding of these *gunas*. They are both in conflict and in cooperation and always are intermingled. They are like the oil, the wick, and the flame of lamp, all of which are necessary to produce the light of lamp, yet all of which differ in their characteristics. The *gunas* cannot be perceived directly and can only be inferred from their effects. Every object or thing has all of these three *gunas*, and the differences in objects are caused due to the different proportions of these *gunas*. The nature of an object is determined by the predominant *guna*. There is a state when all these three *gunas* are not compounded, and each of the *gunas* are opposed by each of the other *gunas*, creating thus a state of equilibrium where none of the characteristics of these *gunas* are manifested. This state is completely devoid of any characteristics and so is incoherent, indeterminate, and indefinite. It is a homogeneous state without any quality. This state of being appears as though it were non-being. This state is called *prakṛti*. This state cannot be said to exist or to not exist. There is apparently no purpose of this state and it is the starting point of the creation of all things. This is the initial point of time or stage. It is only when this stage is disturbed that all modifications of objects take place.

### **The State of Equilibrium**

According to Sankhya, creation starts from a state of complete equilibrium of the three *gunas*, the state of *prakṛti*. In this state the *gunas* had disintegrated into a state of dissolution and became disjointed, producing equilibrium by mutual opposition. The first disturbance that arose in this state of equilibrium caused creation. This disturbance caused the disturbance of the separation of the *gunas*, which once again started compounding among themselves thus producing variety among substances. Thus the

universe that had become indeterminate, became more and more evolved and determinate. The *gunas* are continuously separating and reuniting. This series of evolution, beginning from the first disturbance of *prakṛti* to the creation of the order in the universe, is governed by a law that cannot be violated. This evolution comprises the development of the differentiated within the undifferentiated, of the determinate within the indeterminate, of the coherent within the incoherent. This evolution is not from the part to the whole; it is not also from the whole to the part. It is from a less differentiated, less determinate, less coherent whole to a more differentiated, more determinate, more coherent whole. So, all the changes in terms of the different combinations of the *gunas* actually take place within *prakṛti*. The whole of *prakṛti* does not get disturbed. The totality of the *gunas* does not leave the state of equilibrium. Evolution only means that a large portion of *gunas* have become disturbed.

Evolution takes place upon the coming together of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. *Prakṛti* is continuously changing, even in the state of dissolution. In the state of dissolution the change is homogeneous. Heterogeneous change brings disturbance in the state of equilibrium and causes evolution. Evolution is cyclic and is followed by dissolution. Evolution serves the purpose of *puruṣa*. It gives objects of enjoyment to the *puruṣa* and also helps in its liberation by discernment between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*.

These are the basic concepts of Sankhya philosophy propounded by Kapila. Here, it is held that *prakṛti* is the equilibrium of the three *gunas* and falling from this equilibrium state, modifications like *mahat*, cosmic mind, are brought about. This is not possible. Why? Because *prakṛti* is matter and not conscious.

(To be continued)

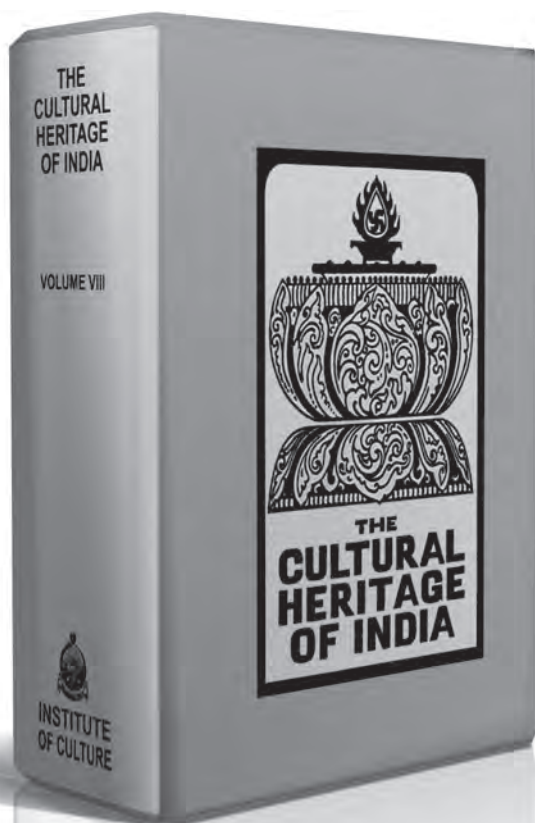


## REVIEW ARTICLE

# ***The Cultural Heritage of India, Volume 8: The Making of Modern India (1765–1947)***

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**T**HE RAMAKRISHNA–VIVEKANANDA movement is today a multidimensional phenomenon. Spirituality, its core, informs and integrates the entire spectrum of human excellence. While its impact has led to responses from savants of an amazing pluralism of cultures and

faiths, it has also emerged as a paradigm that balances these heritages with their contemporary configurations. Moreover, it has also institutionalized its functioning with a transparency and reach that became a model for, among others, even the corporate sector.

The movement has also created, with quiet dedication and authenticity, a comprehensive text tradition of both secular and sacred goals. This vital contribution in English is remarkable for its freedom from the pervasive myths of English as 'a lie of the land', engendering 'an intimate enemy' with colossal colonial hangovers. There are no explicit or hidden 'masks of conquest'. As D P Mukherji says: 'No snobbish attempts at equality with the powerful nations of the West by fictitious claims for spiritual superiority, no dissent *qua* dissent, no rehash of Comte, Mill and Hamilton, no loss of breath trying, trying to keep pace with the progress of the world' (1155). Professor Nemai Sadhan Bose, who cites this passage, says: 'Yet the contribution made by the very "common", "unmodern", "illiterate" priest to the rejuvenation of Hinduism, the restoration of "lost" faith in Indian Culture, and reassertion of human dignity was unmatched by any other luminary of this century' (1155–6).

The texts produced remain sourcebooks of impeccable thoroughness, all written in chaste, idiomatic English. In fact, if 'English is the greatest gift of Goddess Saraswathi to India', as the celebrated C Rajagopalachari is reputed to have observed, few institutions have made use of the gift to create a remarkable quantum of basic literature in the areas of spirituality, culture, arts, and other related fields.

With the publication of the eighth volume of *The Culture Heritage of India* what Swami Nityaswarupananda, the former secretary of the Institute of Culture, has prophesied becomes a reality: 'Will, it is hoped, contribute in some measure to the appreciation of Indian cultural values and point to the part which India can play in the future world renaissance' (1.xi). Moreover, this is the second edition, revised and enlarged, originally conceived by the renowned scholars Dr Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, Dr Suniti

Kumar Chatterjee, Dr Nihar Ranjan Ray, and others. Under the gracious guidance of Swami Prabhananda, now a vice president of the Ramakrishna Order, the series took the present shape, with Dr Tapan Raychaudhury as the adviser and Dr Sukumar Bhattacharyya and Dr Uma Das Gupta as editors. The dynamism and dedication of Swami Sarvabhutananda, the secretary of the Institute of Culture at the time of the publication of this eighth volume, and his team is so evident that we owe them a deep debt of gratitude.

This massive volume contains eight parts, with a sizeable number of articles grouped under eight themes: 'Socio-Cultural Developments', 'Political and Economic Development', 'Religious Developments', 'Recovery of the Past: Inside India', 'Study of Indian Culture Abroad', 'India and the West', 'Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement', 'Impact of Tagore and Gandhi on Modern India'. There is also an 'Epilogue' and an 'Appendix'. The sixty-five contributors are well-known scholars in their respective areas. This review focuses on some of the issues that arise from their essays.

### **Modern India**

I wondered why 1765, but then I recalled that while 1600 saw the East India Company receiving its charter, 1765 saw Clive becoming the governor of Bengal—from a ledger clerk to the governor of Bengal is quite a leap of manoeuvring, profiting, plundering, and fighting, like the Carnatic wars. Perhaps 1765 explains the overall focus of the volume on Bengal, since it was the first to experience the full impact now, both negative and positive. And, if contemporary trends are any evidence, the same formula of 'privatizing the profit and socialising the losses' continue, whether it is public or private enterprise. In this regard, the essays on growing urbanization in India and the continuing poverty

levels in the rural highlight some of these tensions. But the overall impression is, as Bhabatosh Datta has put it, that ‘the pioneers of the 19th century had gone into the basic problems of our economic life and, had tried to come to logical conclusions within the limited framework they had available before them’ (575). With unlimited material available, there is also ambivalence about the very measuring of growth—recently Prof. Amartya Sen and others are proposing the radical mismeasurement of economic growth in terms of statistics, so that the real aim of accessibility to the benefits of growth remains an ideal. This needs mention, since the social sciences and their implications in theory and practice have been emphasized in the Vivekananda programme for the uplift of the masses.

Another interesting discussion is that on caste and its ramifications, in the essays on this area. For instance, in the essays that discuss caste, often vis-à-vis Swamiji, there are varied readings. As found in the Bengali Hindu society during this period, caste is condemned as highly iniquitous, irrational and, morally indefensible. Yet, in another context, it is also seen as a structure ‘to build up a non-competitive production organisation on the basis of our largely self-sufficient village economy of the pre-industrial age’ (578). Another view presented is that caste did not always act as a block to ‘occupational mobility’, even, it is noted, among the ‘lower’ castes. Gautam Bhadra, in his essay on recent trends in Indian historiography, cites the work of Nirmal Kumar Bose, M N Srinivas, and others that ‘shows how the tribal and other cultural groups on the fringes have been absorbed into the caste societies and how the changes in the control over resources, modification of social functions and aspirations of political powers opened up opportunities of mobility in the so-called static and imbecile society’ (951). Far more important

issues emerge in the essays on ‘Tribal India’ by R H Bhattacharya and Nirmal Kumar Bose. Interestingly, Chidananda Das Gupta’s essay shows how the cinema of this period, which begun with mythology, grew to be a powerful medium for propagating social dynamism in the areas of caste, dowry, and other social issues. *Dharti ke Lal* (Children of the Earth), of K A Abbas and *Neecha Nagar* (Low Life), of Chetan Anand, for instance, inaugurated ‘Cinematic realism’ (335).

To go by the overall tenor of the essays on almost all the areas of culture, an important, indeed indispensable, issue is the attitude they show on the recovery of the heritage, ‘the past’, without negating it totally—many new historiographers do it, by and large—or identifying a ‘usable’ past evident in the present. Is this what T S Eliot called ‘the presence of the past’? There is a categorical assertion and agenda articulated by Gautam Bhadra in his account of recent trends in Indian historiography:

The ‘glorious past’ of India conjured up by the Orientalists and the early Indian nationalists does no longer hold good. Progress and civilization have multiple meanings to people living over a vast region, time and space. The encapsulation of all these multiple experiences into singular and linear explanatory models has its pitfalls. Each coherence has its tensions within and the trends in Indian historiography are to show the contradictions, fractures as well as the temporary subsumption over a period of time (951).

If one can bypass the proliferation of post-modern idiom, what seems to be the ‘method’, the past is not to be romanticized, and specially the one created by the ‘Orientalists’. But then there is Inder Nath Choudhuri in this volume, who covering at random Indian literature says: ‘In India, modernism as a phenomenon or value is not unrelated to the past or the future’ (185).



It is not, he adds, a 'voyage backward but a reassertion of the centre through time', thus, 'modernism has both linear and circular movements' (ibid.). But it seems postmodernism has neither.

There is also another view that Mridula Banerjee articulates in her piece on 'Colonial Architecture and Indian Rationalism': 'After fifty years of independence, Indian architects are still searching for the right path to express the nature of their creation. The question is whether it is New-Modernism in the form of regionalism; historicism and deconstruction is a decisive factor for the architects to choose at present' (250). What attracts the public imagination is the return of the Art Deco. Behind or before all these is Edward Said's 'Orientalism', now perhaps losing its earlier primacy.

It is here that the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda phenomenon acquires significance. It needs to be placed before Tagore and Gandhi, for the overall implications of this movement are traceable to the *abhyuda-nibhshreyasa*, model of development, even as it recognizes the apparently negative factors as functionally needed. In its very roots there is recognition of dualism as the building block of the world in which we live. In its institutional logic, it blends secular development with what Swamiji would call 'toned down materialism'. He declared that before any social reform is initiated 'flood the land with spiritual ideals'. This is no pious statement of an evangelist. He knew that the kind of models that would emerge can easily create economic cupid-ity alongside ethical lapses.

Perhaps it is time that the pervasive, consciously or unconsciously, adopted models of the Western Renaissance syndrome and its counterpart, Enlightenment, by Indian thinkers need to be radically revised so far as India is concerned. One casualty needed is to discard the scholarly split of the two values *artha* and *kama*,

economics and enjoyment, from dharma and moksha, ethics and emancipation, from excesses. As Swami Bhajananda closely reasoned, the current studies of the Ramakrishna movement follow the stereotyped approaches. He says: 'In ... modern Indological circles, there has been a move in recent years to play down the pervasive influence of the ideas of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, labelled "Neo-Vedanta" or "Revivalism" and to isolate them from the main body of Hinduism which is held to be predominantly devotional, ritualistic and, mythology-based' (1162). Moreover, there is also 'a section of political activists who identify Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda exclusively with Hinduism and lay down their doctrine of harmony of religions, etc.' (ibid.).

Finally, there is Vedanta in the West, which has become a universal religion, one that has 'its own roots in Western culture,' with 'no clearly defined boundaries, no affiliation to any of the traditional religions' (ibid.)—indeed, a recent study of the phenomenon is called *American Veda* by Philip Goldberg.

### **A New Hermeneutic**

We are now approaching the real issue of making this Ramakrishna phenomenon and its cultural potential as a new hermeneutic, with its resultant principles of harmony—not just of religions but of religions as the guiding principles of other areas of human endeavour to better lives everywhere. The paradox is that Western scholars from many disciplines have responded to the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition as enriching their own. In fact, Swamiji's views on thought as power has interesting implications for David Bohm's thought as a system, while Wittgenstein's language-games get enriched when looked at from Ramakrishna's luminous assertion of mystic experience as the

only linguistically undefiled experience—the salt doll not measuring but getting merged—these areas are fraught with consequences in almost every field of human endeavour.

A review, even as an article, can hardly be comprehensive. The fine arts component has many insights that need careful reading, not a perfunctory reading. Music, dance, drama, and other areas of culture are covered adequately. The articles by Swami Prajnananda and on dance by Mrinalini Sarabhai, especially show the rich cultural contributions of a continuity of tradition alongside modern innovations. Admirers of Sri Ramakrishna would specially value the musical heritage, since the Master was a lover of music and a singer in his own ecstatic way. The Bauls, the tradition of Ramprasad and, Kamalakantha are brought back, one can say, by Sri Ramakrishna. Similarly, South Indian composers and singers like Tyagaraja and Swati Tirunal and, of course, the legendary M S Subbulakshmi—though not of the same period—gave us an imperishable heritage.

Finally, it is necessary to ponder over some of the views expressed by the editorial adviser, the noted historian Prof. Tapan Raychaudhury. His recent memoir, *The World of Our Time*, gives us glimpses of colonial prejudices, and yet his remarks, for instance, on his attitude to the British or the Empire show a frankness that is disarming. An admirer of Britain and her many-splendoured culture, this admiration has intellectual conviction with a sharp emotional edge to it. Given this background, it is interesting to read his views on India's quest for modernity, especially on Sri Ramakrishna. With enviable certitude he affirms that 'Ramakrishna did not "preach" any religious ideas. He talked to a few distinguished persons, intimate devotees and disciples about his mystic realisation that there are many ways to the ultimate experience as there

are systems of belief. He claimed a direct knowledge of Godhead in the form of Kali' (1385). As for Vivekananda, even if he functions as 'a salve' to the 'injured ego of the Hindu *bhadralok* that does not make him a hero of any counter-reform' (1386). That Swamiji said 'I do not believe in reform; I believe in growth' is gently set aside by the professor. Perhaps we are meant to reconsider these insights in the light of the 'reconsidered' strategy Prof. Raychaudhury earlier applied to Europe—but for me, this reconsideration takes time to swallow, let alone digest.

In all respects this volume is a mine of scholarly exploration and, as such, indispensable for our cultural history. Its publication honours the perennial phenomenon that gives the name of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. Now that the eighth volume completes the earlier plan, it is necessary, I feel, to bring out one or two volumes condensing the matters presented in all the eight volumes—like Toynbee's *A Study of History* condensed by Somerville.

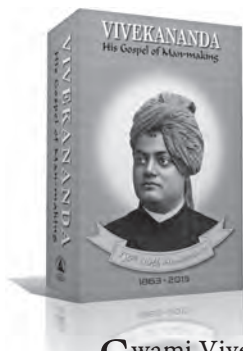
To conclude, analysts of international relations are talking, these days, of 'hard power' and 'soft power', in the wake of Joseph Nye's formulations. Hard power is military, national interests, and so forth; soft power is, among other things, cultural heritage. India's cultural heritage needs to be explored in this context from the perspectives and programmes stemming from the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition. It needs to be done to tone down the disproportionate emphasis on economic factors as the sole criteria of growth. Now that there is a Vivekananda Chair in Chicago University, there is a timely opportunity to evolve not just alternate but inclusive models of development. The nuclei must be drawn from the overall heritages of 'developing' nations, with emphasis on current issues, hence, the significance of these eight volumes.



Dr M Sivaramkrishna

# REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,  
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



## **Vivekananda: His Gospel of Man-making**

Comp. and ed.

Swami Jyotirmayananda

Swami Jyotirmayananda, 38/1400,  
'H' Block, 15th Main Road, Annana-  
gar, Chennai 600 040. Website:  
[www.vivekanandagospel.org](http://www.vivekanandagospel.org). 2013.  
lxi + 1000 pp. ₹ 300.

Swami Vivekananda was a multifaceted genius. At times each of the facets had behind them the entire weight of his unique personality. His luminous and critical mind never failed to shed new light on any subject it chose to dwell upon. He was a guru, a teacher, and a leader par excellence. Besides being a stern ascetic and a yogi, he was a poet and an artist endowed with keen insight into the mysteries and beauties of nature. Swamiji combined in him mysticism and philosophy, yet was an engaging conversationalist. Towering above all these facets, and imparting a divine touch to them, was his spirituality. He harmoniously united in himself faith and reason, religion and science, ethos of the East and the West, as well as ancient and modern culture. Every faculty of human mind—be it intellectual, emotional, or active—found their fullest expression in his grand personality. In short, he is to the present age the epitome of all that is good and desirable for modern humankind. Perhaps this is the reason why Sri Ramakrishna called him the incarnation of 'Nara', man, which is also the name of an ancient sage. It is no wonder therefore that such a gigantic personality and his thoughts should exert a powerful influence on society, both during his lifetime and several centuries later. Such far-reaching influence, we must note, is not possible unless the message it embodies has its roots in the collective aspirations of the human psyche. To Swamiji the progress human society had achieved

in every department of life was an open book, and he turned a new leaf of that book. To arrive at a true estimate of his contribution it is essential to read his works conjointly with the then prevailing thought currents—in assessing the significance of Swamiji's message the role of society in shaping that message cannot be ignored.

This book is an encyclopedic study of both these aspects—Swamiji's influence on society and the impact of society on him. What sets this work apart from others of the same genre is the commendable effort by its editor to place Swamiji in the matrix of the sociocultural milieu of the second half of the nineteenth century. The second part of the book, making up one-third of the entire work, presents a very interesting and comprehensive chronicle that puts the clock back by a century and half. The reader is taken through a fascinating journey from the time of Swamiji's appearance on the world scene until his form disappeared from our mortal gaze. We live with Swamiji, taking note of every significant event in his life and, at the same time, observing major developments in every sphere of human activity—as Swamiji himself might have done, for he was very much alive to the happenings around him. We are brought face to face with political and religious leaders, savants, scientists, and so on, and weighty happenings in their lives that had hit headlines in those days. It must be admitted, however, that the task of spinning a backdrop to Swamiji's role in the world from these diverse bare facts is left to the reader.

Appended to the chronicle is the reaction of the civilized world to the untimely death of Swamiji, which came out in the form of beautiful and soul-stirring obituaries and elegies in various Indian and foreign newspapers and periodicals. On 20 July 1902 the *Gujari* commented: 'Swami Vivekananda is no more. Like a meteor he suddenly appeared on the horizon full of brilliance



and glory and in a short time vanished into infinite space. ... To India he has done invaluable service by showing to the Western nations what she is capable of achieving in the higher spheres of religion and philosophy. He rose like a resplendent star and has set with all his effulgence' (676).

Divided into three sections, the first part of the book begins with a neatly classified and captioned compilation of Swamiji's teachings on the Divinity of humankind, fundamentals of religion, the great heritage of India, and his exhortations to people the world over to wake up. Though briefly, this section gives the quintessence of Swamiji's message and orients the reader to a thorough study of the subject in the pages to follow. A host of articles by distinguished scholars like Arnold Toynbee, S S Raghavachar, Swamis Prabhavananda and Vireswarananda, and so on are included. Evaluating the thoughts of Swamiji follows next. These articles, written on different occasions, are of great help in unearthing the deep significance of Swamiji's teachings.

Rabindranath Tagore says Swamiji's call was 'a call of awakening to the totality of the manhood of man. Like the ever-rolling waves of the ocean the call goes on ceaselessly sounding and resounding all over the world, bringing out a variety of responses and the resultant regeneration' (732). In the next section of the first part, the reader is treated to a vast vista of this ocean with unremitting waves of tributes to Swamiji. Here we have more than one hundred and fifty testimonies to the greatness of Swamiji by savants, swamis, saints, statesmen, and scientists.

Swamiji gave America, as one author puts it, a spiritual jolt (170). The far-reaching and ever-widening ramification of this 'jolt' is the subject of study of the third and fourth parts of the book. Taking his stand on the platform of the august Parliament of Religions, Swamiji proclaimed his message of the inherent Divinity and harmony of religions, which fell irresistibly on the prevalent religious bigotry and fundamentalism. The after-shocks of that jolt were felt on the Indian sub-continent too, forcing Indians to shake off their age-old slumber. It reminded Indians of their glorious religious culture and made them aware of the challenges that were out to undermine it.

The fourth part, 'Winds of Change: Vivekananda and His Impact on the Western Mind', is the latest valuable supplement to the present sixth edition. Drawing heavily from the recently published Philip Goldberg's *American Veda*, this part presents an illuminating account of some of the Western intellectual stalwarts' encounter with Vedanta. Romain Rolland, William James, Arnold Toynbee, Will Durant, Christopher Isherwood, Huston Smith, Gerald Heard, Joseph Campbell, Aldous Huxley, and many others were much influenced by the principles of Vedanta—later their extensive writings played a significant role in furthering the cause of Swamiji and Vedanta in the West.

Brought out in commemoration of Swami Vivekananda's 150th birth anniversary, this enlarged edition is a valuable addition to all personal and general libraries interested in Indian religion and culture. The compiler-editor-publisher deserves the appreciation of all the admirers of Vivekananda for his stupendous effort and dedication in bringing out this work.

Brahmachari Shantichaitanya  
Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission,  
Belur Math



### **Advaita-siddhanta-sara-samgrahah**

Narayanashrama  
Reconstructed and ed.  
Prof. Dilip Kumar Mohanta

Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda  
University, Belur Math, Howrah  
711 202. Website: [www.rkmvu.ac.in](http://www.rkmvu.ac.in).  
2012. xxvi + 53 pp. ₹ 80.

The present work is a reconstructed mediaeval text on Advaita Vedanta, rendered into English—pages i to xxii—and in its original Sanskrit—pages 1 to 53. *Advaita-siddhanta-sara-samgrahah* is a logically developed treatise of the post-Shankara Advaita Vedanta tradition. Narayana-shrama (1517–1600 CE) belonged to the period when there was a considerable impact of the Navya-Nyaya, or Neo-Nyaya, methodology on Advaita Vedanta. Swami Atmapriyananda, Vice Chancellor, Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda

University, in his 'Foreword' specifies the utility of Advaita Vedanta: 'Swamiji wanted Advaita Vedanta to be living and dynamic and that it should interpenetrate and percolate every aspect of individual and collective life.'

The text is a *prakarana grantha*, manual for guidance. It aims at establishing the identity of the jiva and Brahman with the help of subtle arguments and through the Navya-Nyaya methodology, which is well known for its sound epistemological and logical techniques in philosophy.

The work consists of 110 paragraphs dealing with the subject matter of Advaita Vedanta. The jiva, as a microcosm, is essentially identical with Brahman, as a macrocosm. Vedantic teaching is mainly communicated through a *mahavakya*, great saying, 'Tat tvam asi; you are That.' There are also *anubhava vakyas*, declarations of experiences, such as '*ayam atma brahma*; this Atman is Brahman' and '*aham brahmasmi*; I am Brahman'.

Post-Shankara philosophical works make use of four types of *anvaya-vyatireki*, affirmative and negative rules of reasoning. In this treatise the four types of *anvaya vyatireki* are in relation to (i) the perceiver and the perceived, (ii) suffering and love, (iii) the witness and the witnessed, and (iv) the formative extensiveness and non-extensiveness principle (xv). The editor, in his introduction, has tried to clarify the meaning of *vyapti*, inductive generalization, by using a symbolic formula in the case of affirmative induction: 'If in the presence of *x* always there is the presence of *y*, then it is called a case of *anvaya* (*tatsatte tat sattā*) [affirmative induction]. On the other hand, if in the absence of *x* always there is the absence of *y*, it is called a case of *vyatireki* (*tadasatte tadasattā*) [negative induction]' (xvi). However, such an interpretation does not fit in Navya-Nyaya logic, including modern symbolic logic. The standard example used in Navya-Nyaya for establishing a universal general proposition as an affirmative induction is based on the observation of many instances of the coexistence of smoke and fire without any contrary instance. Hence, the formulation of the affirmative proposition as 'wherever there is smoke, there is fire'. In other words, if there is *x*, then there is *y*. In

case of a relevant *vyatireki* as negative invariable concomitance, the observation is based on various instances containing the joint absence of fire and smoke. Accordingly, *vyatireki* reasoning implies a negative form of induction: 'Where there is the absence of fire, there is also the absence of smoke'—for instance, a lake. If there is the absence of *y*, then there is also absence of *x*. Logically, if *x* then *y* = if *-y* then *-x*. Thus, if *-x* then *-y* is false, because the absence of smoke does not necessarily imply the absence of fire—for instance in a red-hot iron ball, and electric stoves, there is fire without smoke.

The affirmative and negative inductions may be formulated accordingly. There are knowable facts in the world, and there is the knower; if there is a knower *x*, then there is a known fact *y*, but if there is no existence of a cognized object, then there is no knower for it. In other words, if *x* then *y* = if *-y* then *-x*. Similarly, wherever there is a witness consciousness, there an object witnessed is an affirmative induction.

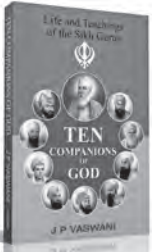
Next, in order to establish Vedantic identity between the jiva and Brahman five examples are used by Narayanashrama. They are: (i) a crystal appears red, (ii) a rope appears as snake, (iii) space in a pot is related to the outer space, (iv) a mirror image as a reflection of its object, and (v) 'this is that Devadatta'.

Since the editor requests for possible constructive remarks for the improvement of the work (iii), the following corrections may be considered: it is necessary to put standard diacritical marks everywhere, including the cover page, contents, and introduction; the Sanskrit table of contents is incomplete, as it should include the titles of all the 110 paragraphs of the text. I hope the next edition will also carefully go through the work and eliminate the many typographical errors both in Sanskrit and English.

The book is useful for scholars and sadhakas of the Vedanta tradition. The editor deserves appreciation for editing and reconstructing this highly technical treatise.

Dr R I Ingalalli

Retired Professor, Chairman, and former Dean,  
Faculty of Social Science, Karnatak University,  
Dharwad



### **Ten Companions of God**

J P Vaswani

Sterling Publishers, A-59, Okhla Industrial Area, Phase II, New Delhi 110 020. Website: [www.sterlingpublishers.com](http://www.sterlingpublishers.com). 2012. 223 pp. ₹ 195.

This book is on the life and teachings of the revered ten Sikh gurus, beginning with Guru Nanak and ending with Guru Gobind Singh. Dada J P Vaswani is a well-known spiritual leader of the Sindhi people worldwide. He has to his credit a host of eminent publications. His teachings are simple and go straight to the heart.

*Ten Companions of God* briefly details a short history of each of the ten Sikh Gurus, their trials, tribulations, and sacrifices towards saving their country and faith. The story of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, finds prominence. The narrative on him starts right from his birth at Rai Bhoeki Talwandi, now known as Nankana Sahib, and to his various pilgrimages and teachings. Guru Nanak in his daily *sangat*, congregation of the devout, introduced chanting the divine Name, the practice of kirtan, and uttering the name of God along with music as a means of linking the soul with its creator. He recommended japa as the most effective sadhana for everyone.

J P Vaswani mentions the good deeds of the ten gurus. Guru Angad, the second guru, produced the present form of the Gurmukhi script, which has become the medium of writing the Punjabi language and in which the hymns of the gurus are expressed. He also started the work of building a new Sikh township at Goindwal near Khadur Sahib.

Similarly, Guru Amardas strengthened the tradition of *Guru ka langar*, community kitchen, and made it compulsory for all visitors to partake of the community meal saying: '*Pehle pangat phir sangat*; community meal first, then congregational singing.' It is said that Guru Ramdas was a great organizer and a dedicated builder of the faith and the community. It was he who laid the foundation stone of Chak Ramdas or Ramdasapur, which is now called Amritsar. He also composed a four stanza hymn called 'Lavan',

around which the standard Sikh marriage ceremony known as Anand Karaj is centred. Guru Arjan Dev is credited with the compilation of the sacred Sri Guru Granth Sahib. He had also put forth the concept of *dasvand*, a tenth of an individual's income, to be offered for the guru's *langar* and as contribution towards service activities for the needy. Guru Hargobind raised a platform called the Akal Takht (Timeless Throne), opposite to the Harmandir Sahib, built by his father. The sacrifices made towards saving the Hindu religion from the tyranny of Aurangzeb by Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh are vividly explained. The Khalsa Panth, militant arm of the Sikhs, the teaching of the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, and the teachings of the Sikh faith are also mentioned.

The book, in a nutshell, gives a brief account of Sikh history, faith, and teachings. J P Vaswani has done justice to the subject of the book. It shows these gurus were not only religious and spiritual leaders but social heroes as well. Those who wish to learn how religion can be a source of dynamism, goodness, and spirituality, along with the essentials of the Sikh faith and the noble life of the gurus, will not have to look further. The book is printed on good quality paper, with clarity and no mistakes.

Santosh Kumar Sharma  
Kharagpur

### **BOOK RECEIVED**



### **The Goal of Life and How to Attain It**

J P Vaswani

Gita Publishing House, Sadhu Vaswani Mission, 10 Sadhu Vaswani Path, Pune 411 001. Website: [www.dadavaswanibooks.org](http://www.dadavaswanibooks.org). 2012. 228 pp. No price mentioned.

Human life is precious, for it is through it that we attain liberation, the *summum bonum* of life. We plan for every eventuality of life but hardly stop to think of the ultimate goal. This book speaks of spiritual sadhanas to attain that ultimate goal.



# REPORTS

## **Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda**

On 8 April 2013 Selvi J Jayalalitha, chief minister of Tamil Nadu, announced the creation of higher research and education centres in the name of Swami Vivekananda in nine universities of Tamil Nadu, namely Madras University, Madurai Kamaraj University, Bharathiyar University, Bharathidasan University, Mother Teresa University, Alagappa University, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Periyar University, and Tiruvalluvar University.

The following centres organized various programmes to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. **Bengaluru:** A meeting of the representatives of some modern Hindu organizations, a seminar for professionals, and a poets' meet from 12 to 14 May, attended by 1,200 people in all. Swami Suhitananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, presided over the meeting of the modern Hindu organizations held on 12 May. **Chennai:** Processions, devotional music, and film shows on Swamiji at Maduranthakam, Chinna Venmani, Vaiyavur, Kalpattu, Mathur, Pudumampakkam, Madaiyampakkam, Valluvapakkam, Anathur, Saravampakkam, and Unamalai on 30 and 31 March, 6, 7, 13, 20, 21 and 27 April, and 4, 11 and 18 May respectively. Spiritual retreat at the centre on 19 May, attended by 160 devotees. **Vedanta Society, New York (USA):** Seminars, interfaith conference, talks, and cultural programmes from 17 to 19 May. Besides, a book and a commemorative volume brought out on

*Interfaith  
conference in  
New York*



the occasion were released. **Chennai Math:** The Vivekananda Youth Forum, run by the centre, held an exhibition on Swamiji, taught devotional songs, and screened motivational short movies for the children of fishermen at a slum in Chennai on 4 May. About 200 children participated. Earlier, the Vivekananda Youth Forum organized cycle rallies, exhibitions, speeches, cultural competitions, and other activities from October 2012 to April 2013, in which about 5,000 people, including 1,500 students, took part. **Colombo (Sri Lanka):** Dance-drama on the life of Swamiji on 21 April, attended by more than 1,000 people. Three books in Sinhala language were released in a function held on 30 April; about 190 people attended the programme. **Gadadhar Ashrama:** Four special lectures from January to April. **Gretz (France):** A two-day programme with seminar, guided meditation, and interfaith music on 19 and 20 May at Annecy, south-eastern France, in which 200 people participated. **Hyderabad:** Personality development training course from 15 to 27 April, attended by 226 youths. **Mumbai:** The centre organized a programme on 31 May in commemoration of the 120th anniversary of Swamiji's historic voyage from the Gateway of India, Mumbai, to the West for participating in the Parliament of Religions at Chicago. Sri Pranab Mukherjee,

president of India; Sri K Sankaranarayanan, governor of Maharashtra; Sri L K Advani, former deputy prime minister of India; Sri Manohar Joshi, former chief minister of Maharashtra, and some other dignitaries addressed the public meeting held at Mumbai University. Two books on Swamiji were released by Sri Sankaranarayanan. Besides, a small programme was held at the Gateway of India; about 1,000 people attended the programme. **Ootacamund:** The Vivekananda Ratha Yatra organized by the centre concluded on 27 May after having covered most of the villages of Nilgiri district, Tamil Nadu, in 41 days. On 26 May a meeting was held at Saint Thomas Church in Ootacamund, which preserves the mortal remains of J J Goodwin, the celebrated disciple of Swamiji. **Rajahmundry:** Yoga convention, spiritual retreat, and doctors' convention on 27 and 28 April, attended by 300 people. **Rajkot:** 16 programmes comprising talks, songs, and mono-act drama on Swamiji, at various places in Gujarat, attended by about 6,000 persons in all. **Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, New York (USA):** A special event at the Morgan Library & Museum, New York, on 12 April. **Ramharipur:** Nari Shiksha o Sachetanata Shibir (Women's Orientation Camp) on 11 May, attended by 320 housewives, mostly from nearby villages. **Ranchi Morabadi:** District level youth camp at Maliyada village of Khunti, district in Jharkhand, in which 261 youths participated. **Silchar:** Value orientation camp on 22 and 23 May, attended by 165 students and 45 teachers of 30 schools. Cultural competitions on 24 May, in which 250 students of 26 schools took part. **Swamiji's Ancestral House:** Seven lectures at different places in and around Kolkata between 21 April and 20 May, attended by 2,700 people in all. Two cultural programmes at the centre by the children of a local school on 21 April and 20 May, attended by 1,200 people.

**Tiruvalla:** Two youth camps at Ranni and Aranmula on 15 and 23 May respectively, in which 345 students participated. **Vedanta Society, New York (USA):** Seminars, interfaith conference, talks, and cultural programmes from 17 to 19 May. Besides, a book and a commemorative volume brought out on the occasion were released.

### **News from Branch Centres**

The newly built bookstall and office room at **Ramakrishna Ashrama, Kathmandu, Nepal**, were inaugurated on 13 March, the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna. The centre launched a mobile bookstall on 13 May, Akshaya Tritiya Day.

The newly constructed first floor on the dispensary building at the town centre of **Ramakrishna Mission, Rajahmundry**, was inaugurated on 27 April.

Sri M K Narayanan, governor of West Bengal, inaugurated the centenary celebration of **Ramakrishna Ashrama, Tiruvalla**, on 12 May.

On 16 May the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) handed over the Roy Villa—the house in **Darjeeling** where Sister Nivedita stayed during her last days and passed away on 13 October 1911—to the Government of West Bengal for setting up there a Centre of Excellence by the Ramakrishna Mission. A tripartite agreement was signed by the government, the GTA,

*Roy Villa house in Darjeeling*



and the Ramakrishna Mission with regard to the development of the building. Swami Suhitananda signed the agreement on behalf of the Mission. On the same day the chief minister of West Bengal announced an ex-gratia of one crore rupees for the renovation of the Villa.

Swami Suhitananda laid the foundation stone for the proposed hostel building for postgraduate students of the college at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur**, on 17 May.

**Ramakrishna Mission Hospital, Itanagar**, opened a bookstall within its hospital complex on 25 May, Buddha Purnima Day.

**Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chennai**, served buttermilk to about 2,400 wayfarers daily from 1 to 31 May.

Two centres conducted summer camps for students, which included activities like chanting, bhajans, moral lessons, yogasanas, and others: **Chennai Mission Ashrama**, from 5 to 26 May, attended by 67 children, and **Hyderabad**, from 29 April to 25 May, attended by 920 children.

## Relief

**Distress Relief** • The following centres distributed various items to needy people. **Baranagar Mission**: 369 saris on 13 May; **Ramharipur**: 200 kg rice among 20 poor widows on 16 May; **Vrindaban**: 1,200 kg rice, 1,200 kg wheat flour, 300 kg dal, 300 kg mustard oil, 600 kg salt, and 150 kg sugar among 600 old widows on 13 May.

**Cyclone Relief** • In the aftermath of a destructive cyclone in Mawshynrut and Nongstoin blocks of West Khasi Hills district, **Cherrapunji** centre distributed 3,390 kg rice, 1,156 kg dal, 108 kg biscuits, 200 kg of milk powder, 289 garments, 200 tarpaulin sheets, 200 bags, 578 blankets, and 200 utensil sets (each set containing a cooking pot, a plate, a tumbler, a bowl, a ladle, a bucket, a jug, and a mug), among 289 families in 14 villages on 1 and 8 May.

**Drought Relief** • In the wake of severe drought in certain parts of Karnataka and Maharashtra,

several centres supplied drinking water to affected families. **Shivanahalli** (Bengaluru): 3,220,000 litres to 13,470 people in 8 villages of Malur Taluk in Kolar district from 27 April to 26 May. **Aurangabad**: 2,619,200 litres to 6,100 people in 8 villages of Aurangabad district from 27 April to 25 May. **Pune**: 1,310,000 litres to 30,606 people in 17 villages of Ahmednagar district from 28 April to 28 May. Besides, **Bengaluru Math** built a drinking water tank and distributed fodder to feed nearly 200 cattle in Gulletikaval village, near Bengaluru.

**Fire Relief** • On 3 May **Dinajpur** (Bangladesh) centre distributed 15 saris, 15 chaddars, 6 jugs, and 6 plates among 15 families whose dwellings had been gutted by a devastating fire in Jotmukundapur and Kakar villages in Dinajpur district.

**Hailstorm Relief** • Following a destructive hailstorm in Bankura district, **Ramharipur** centre distributed 1,040 roof tiles, 250 matkas (round roof tiles), 233 asbestos sheets, and 10 kahans of hay among 108 families of 3 villages from 28 April to 10 May. ❧

Dear Friends,

In *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and *The Gospel of the Holy Mother* we come across the names of many blessed souls who came in contact with Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi. Needless to say, many people are interested to know about the descendants of those blessed souls—where they are living, what they are doing, and other details.

If you have authentic information about the descendants of the disciples and devotees of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother, please send that to us. We would process the information and make it available to those who are interested in the matter.

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